

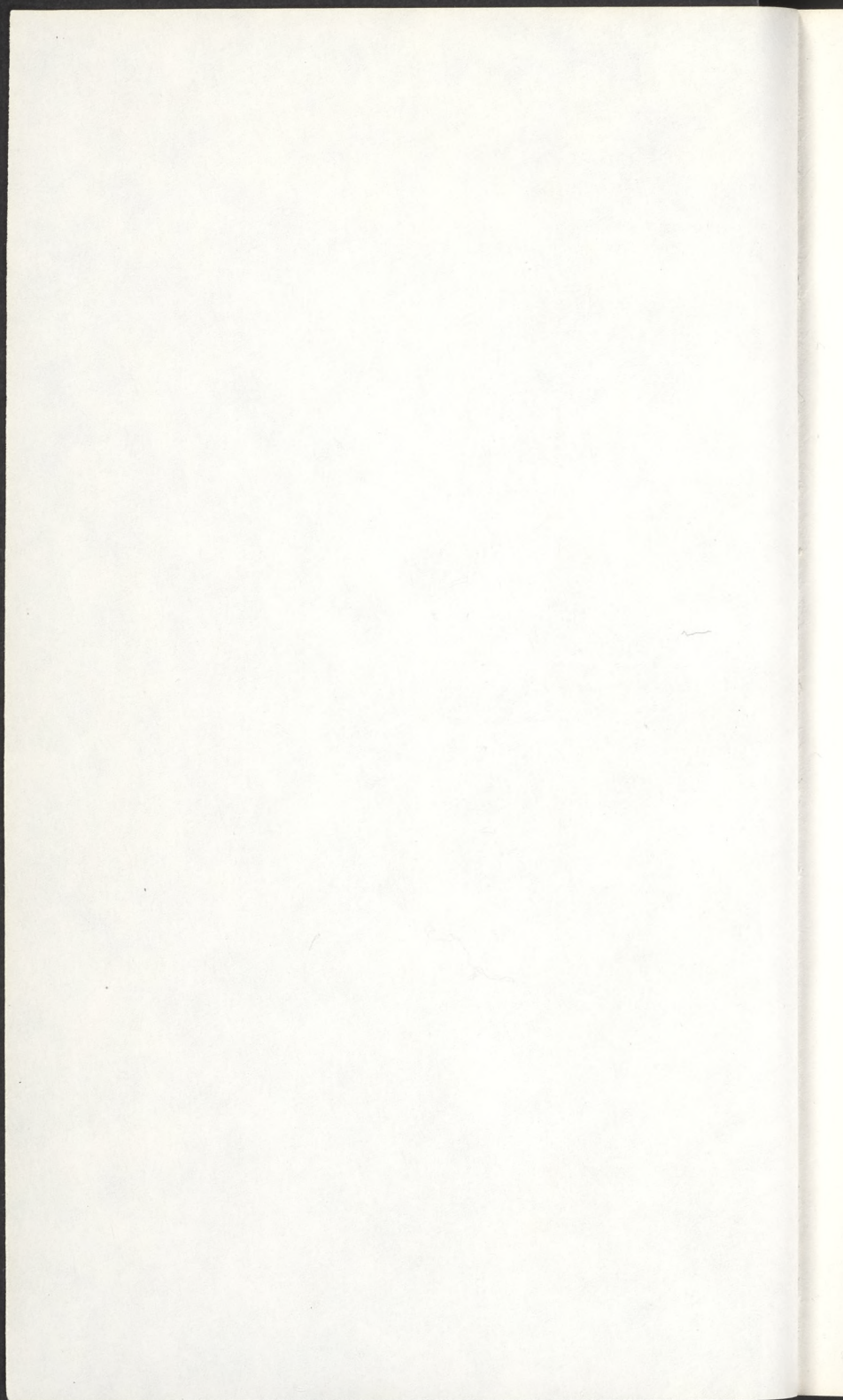






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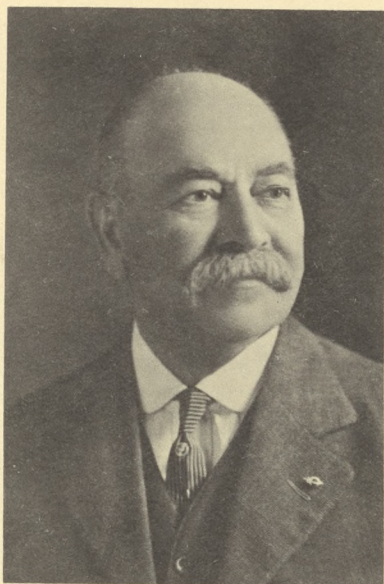


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*The*  
VENTURA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
*QUARTERLY*



Achille Levy

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# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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# The Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly

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## Dr. Stephen Bowers

The reader would be well advised not to arrive at too hasty an opinion of Stephen Bowers on the basis of the story in this issue. The highly complex personality that was his cannot be adequately presented in such a short space. Some time ago, we were informed that one of the members of the staff at the Southwest Museum was planning a book-length biography of Bowers, but death had taken the author before the project began. Such a book would make interesting reading and will, no doubt, be written some day. If it is, the editor makes this prediction: When he is through, the author will know little more about the riddle that was Stephen Bowers than he did when he began his research.

Vital statistics on the man are a simple matter. According to newspaper accounts, Bowers was born in Indiana in 1832. He was ordained a Methodist minister in 1852, and served in the Union forces as a chaplain for one year during the Civil War. He received his M.A. degree from Indiana University and the degree of Ph. D. from Willamette University of Oregon. At the time of his death in Los Angeles, Bowers was in his 74th year.

Much of the controversy around Dr. Bowers stems from his archaeological activities in the Ventura and Santa Barbara regions. Today, he is regarded by some scientists as a crackpot and a farce, yet the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. still thinks rather highly of his work. The differing opinions are typical of the man. The only scientific treatise written by Bowers that we have had occasion to have checked by modern authorities is *Notes On the Geology of Ventura County*. The decision in this case was that the work was excellent for its early period of publication.

The story presented in this issue is concerned with Bowers the newspaper editor. As usual, the doctor is involved in controversy!



# Dr. Stephen Bowers, Controversialist

By CHAS. F. OUTLAND

Boys will be boys; although, in the inexorable course of events, ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent of the vitamin-stuffed little scamps outgrow the affliction. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the remaining one-tenth of one percent became newspaper editors. Here, under the protecting wings of the Bill of Rights and unfettered from the inhibitions and consciences of normal men, they could continue their brawling juvenile antics.

The fireworks began with the arrival in San Buenaventura of O. P. Hoddy, founder of the *Ventura Free Press*. The *Signal* had possessed a monopoly in the newspaper field of Ventura since J. H. Bradley published the first issue on April 22, 1871. Even a newspaper editor found it difficult to quarrel with himself in the seventies, although this breed could come closer to performing the feat than any other. The first issue of the *Free Press* appeared on November 14, 1875, and the stage was set for many fine hassles in the years ahead between the gentlemen of the fourth estate. The boys fought over politics; they fought over the More murder and the trial of Frank Sprague; they fought for the pure love of fighting; and when no other cause was available, they would argue over who had best served his country during the Civil War!

It was not, however, until the arrival in 1883 of Stephen Bowers, A.M., Ph.D., Fellow of the Geological Society of America, corresponding member of the Philadelphia Conchological Society, Academy of Political and Social Sciences, etc., etc., that the fine art of editorial name calling by innuendo flowered into its golden age. The trick, which required subtleness and finesse, was to cast every manner of foul and derogatory aspersion upon one's opponent (never mentioning any names of course) and still retain a bare immunity against libel suits. During his ten years residence in Ventura County, Bowers published a number of different newspapers including the *Free Press*, *Vidette*, *Santa Paula Golden State*, and the *Ventura Observer*. There was never a dull moment as long as the doctor had access to a printing press.

Dr. Bowers was one of those magnetic characters—he could attract trouble as easily as honey attracts ants. One of his more fascinating brawls was spawned contemporaneously with the launching of the *Observer*. In the melee that followed, Bowers was to attack no less than the sheriff, undersheriff, town marshal, board of supervisors, town trustees, the editors of the *Free Press* and the *Unit* (a paper that Bowers contemptuously referred to as the UNICK,) and last, but most important of all, the town's thirteen saloons. There was nothing new or startling about these last opponents. The crusading Stephen Bowers was perpetually engaged in battle with the forces of sin, although there were times when his readers may have suspected that the subject held an undue fascination for the man!



The fight started off in a mild enough manner with Bowers presenting figures to show that the annual expenditures of the town's thirteen saloons was \$24,960. "Now as these gentlemen are not engaged in the drunkard making business simply for the pastime but for the money there is in it, it is safe to say each must average \$1,000 a year, which makes a grand total of \$37,960 annually . . . It does not include the money that changes hands in gambling in these places, it is simply the drink bill . . ." Then, under a different heading: "For the benefit of those desiring to know we give a list of the officers of Ventura County and the salary each received." On the face of it, these two items appeared irrelevant to each other; but Bowers was merely laying a proper foundation for the campaign to come—corruption at the courthouse, aided and abetted by the saloon keepers.

By the third issue of the *Observer*, August 21, 1891, the doctor had intensified his attacks: "There has been no little complaint on the part of the taxpayers concerning the lavish expenditures of the people's money in conducting the affairs of the county. It has been rather an improper thing for the newspapers in this town to say much about it, as their bread and butter comes largely from county patronage . . . We have great respect personally for the majority of the present Board of Supervisors . . . but from a business point of view we are compelled to say that they do not use the people's money with the same economy they do their own."

The *Observer* took deliberate aim at the salaries paid to the courthouse personnel, with the emphasis being directed at the sheriff and his management of that office. Here, as in the case of the board of supervisors, there was nothing personal. Bowers always went to great lengths to stress this point, but his statements were never too convincing.

On September 4th, the editor made reference for the first time to "bossism" and boss rule: This paper does not propose quarreling with anybody but no boss, however powerful, can control it . . . We are not capable of making a paper that would suit them. In order to do so we would have to be a saloon bumner and stand in with rings and ringsters . . ."

Dr. Bowers really outdid himself in this September 4th issue of the *Observer*. After accusing the city and county law enforcement officers of "conniving with the lowest element this town affords," and, "It is the corrupt saloon in politics that is poisoning the body politic and the squandering of the honest taxpayer's money that we are fighting," he concludes his editorial with the assertion that the word is out to crush the *Observer* and that the plan will succeed unless more people subscribe to the paper! The *piece de resistance*, however, was this edifying description of Main Street night life in San Buenaventura, 1891:

"As everyone in the county probably knows the law requires all drinking places closed between the hours of 11 P.M. and 6 A.M. That this law is violated right before the eyes of every peace officer in Ventura is notoriously true.



"On a recent Saturday evening a reporter of the *Observer* took a walk along portions of Main Street between the hours of 11 and 12 o'clock, and between Oak and Figueroa streets he found five saloons in full blast and it is currently reported that gambling and carousing is carried on in some of them the entire night. Glasses were clinking, billiard balls knocking, maudlin songs were being sung, and wild revelry was carried on within. At the rear of one saloon a strumpet was entering amid the geers (sic) of several men who stood outside. The reporter was told that it was quite common for these fallen creatures to enter rooms by the backway . . . From another dive an officer whose *sworn duty* it is to see that these places are closed at 11 o'clock, was seen to immerge."

The following week Bowers continued his attacks, but by now the *Free Press* and *Unit* were coming to the aid and comfort of the enemy. Alf D. Bowen, editor of the *Free Press*, ridiculed: "The side of temperance was not advanced to any appreciable extent by the remarks made by its advocate at the Town Board Monday night. It was not so much a desire to have the saloons closed at 11 o'clock as it was to make himself conspicuous and to cast reflections upon a couple of our town and county officers that actuated Bowers in making his remarks. Fortunately the officers he inveighs against stand quite as well in the community as he does and are quite as well known, so that what he says makes but little difference one way or another."

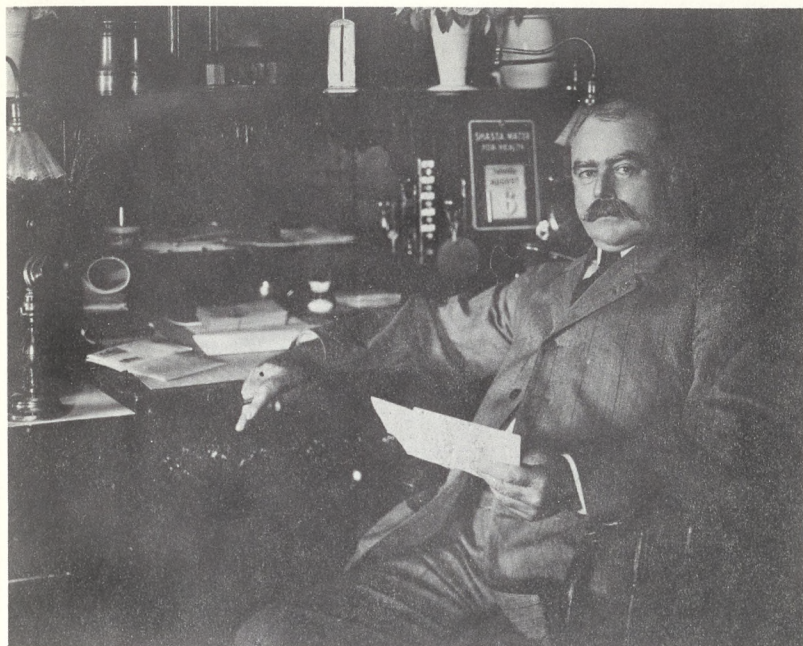
The meeting of the Ventura Town Trustees mentioned above is interesting in that it was established here that the town marshal was responsible for the enforcement of the saloon closing ordinance rather than the officers from the sheriff's office. The marshal, a strong advocate of the doctrine "Discretion is the better part of valor," let it be known that he was not about to tangle with thirteen saloon keepers over such a trifling matter! Even Bowers had to concede that the marshal's position was understandable but maintained that the county officers should be available for assistance under the law.

Then, turning on the editor of the *Free Press* (who Dr. Bowers delighted in calling "The gosling from Astoria,") he harrangued: "That paper is as thoroughly under boss rule as ever Tammany was under Tweed." And as for Bowen, he was "an egotistical young man from Astoria who jumps unbidden into the middle of the arena, spits on his hands and asks somebody to step on his coat tail!"

Bowen admitted in the following issue of the *Free Press* to being the young man from Astoria, but states that he "has never sold out his party, or has been ousted from a membership to a church for unbecoming behavior, or made overtures to a county official to destroy printed blanks in order to give him a job." The innuendos in the *Free Press'* remarks were to the effect that the editor of the *Observer* had been guilty of such unethical conduct, and that Bowers had a far deeper interest in sin than mere academic research and investigation!

The righteous old patriarch of the *Observer* hurled challenge after challenge at his enemy, defying him to prove the insinuations.





Sheriff Will Reilly. Dr. Bowers accused  
Reilly of "boss rule" in Ventura.

At the same time, Bowers had to admit that Bowen had worded his story so cleverly there was no possibility of a libel suit. There was no higher left-handed compliment one newspaper editor could pay to another. Strangely enough, the *Observer's* attacks on the saloons and "fallen creatures" of Main Street slackened noticeably for several weeks. The barbed harpoons continued to fly in the direction of the courthouse, but Bowers appears to have concentrated on relieving his readers' minds of any doubts Bowen may have planted there.

The chief targets of the *Observer* were now Sheriff Reilly, Under-sheriff Wason, Town Marshall Cook, and the "gosling from Astoria." Again Bowers noted there was nothing personal in his attacks but merely "a desire to set forth facts for the benefit of that class of ringsters and their dirt-eating sycophants who are trying to crush the *Observer*." Sheriff Reilly was accused of hiring four new deputies and then leaving his post of duty to attend the San Diego horse races; Wason was again charged with padding his transportation of prisoners account and obtaining taxpayer's money by other illegal means. As for the town marshal: "Against Mr. Cook we have no personal contest, but as an officer he has certainly failed in the most essential points." The editors of the *Unit* and the *Free Press* were the recipients



of this barrage from the October 28th issue of the *Observer*: "In their issues of this week the *Unick* and also the *What-is-it* conducted by the 'Young man from Astoria,' tender some fatherly advice to the editor of the *Observer*, and resolve themselves into a mutual admiration society for the Courthouse ring . . . "

The following week Bowers suggested that telephone lines be laid from all parts of town to Cerf's gambling house, "for you'd never fail to strike from one to four officers there." In a less facetious vein, the *Observer's* editor recommended a thorough investigation by the Ventura County Grand Jury into graft and law-breaking.

During the same week, the *Unit* embarrassed Bowers and placed him on the defensive with this comment: "If the editor who has so much to say about extravagant pay of county officials did not receive \$3 per day for doing positively nothing, and purely as a reward for political services, the people might have some confidence in his sincerity . . . " The *Unit* was referring to Bowers' position as Port Inspector. The reader may judge for himself how arduous the task must have been in 1891, but the doctor replied to the *Unit* with an unconvincing argument complaining of the long hours and heavy expenses associated with the job!

A word of explanation is probably in order to explain the political setup in the county in 1890. In contrast to the system in use today, all county and city officers were elected on a strictly partisan basis with regular party nominating meetings held before elections. The *Unit*, *Free Press* and *Observer* were all Republican in their sympathies; although Bowers insisted there were two kinds of Republicans: saloon Republicans and anti-saloon Republicans. The doctor had completely disrupted party harmony with his attacks on the incumbant Republican office holders and his tirades against the saloons. It is this fact that accounts for the many references to his disloyalty and to being a traitor to his party. It also explains the commendable silence observed by John McGonigle, editor of the Ventura *Democrat*. McGonigle's paper, being the only one in town with Democratic affiliations, was delighted to see the Republicans at each other's throats. "Old Sitting Bull," as John called himself, agreed with Bowers that there were two kinds of Republicans; but his descriptions of the two sub-species were somewhat different than Bowers'! Certainly there was nothing of Christian charity in the *Democrat's* abstinence from the brawl under discussion, for McGonigle and Bowers had been bitter rivals from the day they first became competitors in the newspaper field of San Buenaventura.

On November 4th, the *Observer* ran the following mock ad: "Wanted, a business partner with enough brains to edit the *Free Press* and sense enough to come under shelter when it rains."

The Los Angeles *Daily Journal* got into the act on Bowers' behalf at this time by stating that: "An editor who combines the qual-



ities of a rooster, a gosling and a jenny, should be exhibited as a freak!"

After starting one of the bitterest newspaper quarrels that San Buenaventura had seen in years, Bowers had the audacity to print the following comment on November the 11th: "Most respectable people dislike quarrels between newspapers and none more so than the writer." What was more important, the Grand Jury report was now released on the conditions the doctor had been crusading against. The findings of that body confirmed in every detail the charges made by the *Observer*. "We also report that the officers of both town and county whose duty it is to enforce the law neglect their duty in this respect . . ." the Grand Jury found public sympathy to be "with or under the influence of the saloon element and that little or no encouragement is given to the peace officers to carry out the law." Further, the Grand Jury found irregularities in the sheriff's office and recommended that the district attorney take steps to recover money illegally paid to Undersheriff Wason. Bowers stated that the sum involved was \$2,350.

It was only natural, now that the Grand Jury had given its moral support to Bowers, that the latter should call for the defeat of the town marshal and the town trustees in the forthcoming election. The Republicans had met and nominated the incumbents. There was no Democratic slate on the ballot; instead a Citizen's ticket was prepared and ran on the time proven, one-plank platform of "Throw the rascals out."

The reaction of the *Free Press* now reached vitriolic proportions. Bowen called Bowers "a lying old hypocrite" and "that old mountebank pursuing a guerrilla warfare." The *Observer* replied with a scathing denunciation of Sheriff Reilly and Undersheriff Wason and reported the district attorney was preparing action against the pair. The *Democrat* quietly maintained that Wason and Reilly were within their legal rights. John McGonigle well knew that the judge who would hear the case was a staunch Republican.

In the meantime, the Ventura Town Trustees were in a most embarrassing position. It was one thing to be on the receiving end of Bowers' criticisms but something altogether different to have the Grand Jury breathing down one's neck. Action was needed and needed quickly. The deplorable conditions existing in regard to the flagrant violations of the saloon closing ordinance could no longer be ignored. The trustees met shortly before the election and faced the issue like men. Then they repealed the ordinance!

It may have been coincidence or it may have been planned that way, but Judge Williams handed down his decision in the action brought by the district attorney against Reilly and Wason at almost the same time as the municipal election. The judge ruled that the two officers were as clean as a hound's tooth.

Shortly before the election, the Hueneme *Herald* dipped its oar into the troubled waters of San Buenaventura and came up with this choice morsel of grass-roots philosophy: "One of the Ventura papers is making a bitter attack on some of the county officials, and while we





John McGonigle, Editor of the Ventura Democrat. McGonigle often referred to himself as "Old Sitting Bull."

are not in sympathy with the probable motive that prompts the attack in this instance, still we believe that a little stirring up of county officials once in awhile is not a bad thing."

The citizens of Ventura apparently felt that a little stirring up once in awhile was a very good thing, for they overwhelmingly elected the reform candidates on the Citizens Ticket. The results of the election, plus Judge Williams' decision, should have ended the affair, but it did not.

No one will ever know exactly what happened in the office of the *Observer* the following morning, for there were no impartial witnesses to the fight. The San Francisco papers gave Bowers' side of the story prominent coverage: "This morning while the editor of the *Daily Observer* was in his office writing at his table Charles T. Wason, deputy sheriff of this county came in, closing the door and using insulting language. Dr. Bowers ordered him out, and still remaining seated with his back and side turned toward Wason. While he was in this position Wason struck him with all his force, knocking him forward on the table and following it with half a dozen severe blows. As soon as Bowers could recover himself Wason retreated through the front door and made tracks for the courthouse." Writing on the matter in the *Observer*, Bowers declared he was stunned almost into unconsciousness



by the severity of the attack of the "cowardly Wason." This was too bad, for although Bowers was "twice as old and only half as big" he could easily have thrashed the "contemptible coward."

Over at the office of the *Democrat*, old Sitting Bull had a Roman holiday with the fiasco. Under the heading SET-TO BETWEEN JOHN L. WASON AND JAKE KILRAIN BOWERS, McGonigle wrote of his unequivocal opposition to free fights but if they were going to occur "they should be judged as impartially as possible." John's attitude stemmed from the fact that Bowers had written the story and handed it to the wire services, with the result that the California papers were giving the dispatch prominent coverage. Naturally, Wason's version of the affair was unmentioned in this press release. Somewhere along the line, an ambitious rewrite man had even given Wason a pair of brass knuckles; although Bowers, himself, had definitely stated the cowardly attack was made with bare fists.

The Wason side of the story was printed in full by the *Democrat*. According to this version, the undersheriff came quietly into Bowers' office and suggested that the editor discontinue his attacks. Such a course, stated Wason, was quite reasonable now that Judge Williams had ruled in his favor. The request so enraged Bowers that he arose from his chair and swung on his adversary. Wason then "gave him a slap on the face as he approached and he ran into another room from which the door leading to the street is situated and as I was passing out he came at me again, then I 'put an illegant shanty over his eye' and left."

The only point on which all parties could agree was that as Wason was leaving the scene to return (or retreat) to the courthouse, Bowers came out of his office hurling charges of "dastardly, contemptible coward" after his opponent.

Thus the affair ended. Within a week the story was so stale that the *Observer* allowed it to lapse. But Stephen Bowers believed in being prepared for these unforeseen contingencies. Even before his fight against the saloons was over, he had picked a quarrel with the Santa Ana Water Works by accusing that corporation of issuing a falsified statement to cover up over-charges to its customers. He had also been prodding the medical society on the matter of medical ethics but in this respect he was no match for the venerable Dr. Bard.

It was not long before Bowers left Ventura and moved to the southern part of the state. He continued active in the newspaper field and maintained his interest in science and religion until the day of his death. Shortly before that event took place, the following news item appeared in the *Free Press* of November 21, 1902: "Dr. Stephen Bowers, formerly of Ventura, 'an astronomer and a believer in the inspiration of the Scriptures,' according to the *Times* has located Heaven and says that it is hollow. The discovery of the Doctor has been made after a study of fourteen years." Unfortunately, Stephen Bowers, A.M., Ph.D., etc., etc., died before revealing the location of his discovery.



# The Bank of A. Levy

AS TOLD TO ROBERT PFEILER

BY RUSSELL CARROLL

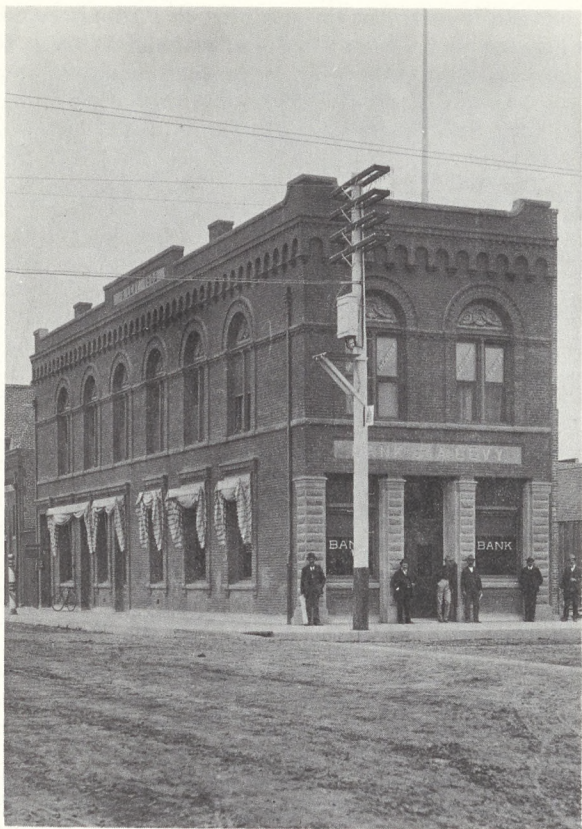
July 20, 1955, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the incorporation of the Bank of A. Levy. From a modest beginning with total resources of \$559,339.20 and a staff of about five people, the bank has grown within the Oxnard area to a total in capital accounts of in excess of \$1,700,000, total resources in excess of \$20,000,000 and a staff of thirty-five. During the entire corporate existence, the bank has never failed to pay an annual dividend, nor to add to its capital accounts.

The bank was the outgrowth of the private banking business known as Bank of A. Levy, conducted by Achille Levy. He had come to this country in 1873, having been born 20 years earlier in Alsace, France. His father died when he was a child; and he had worked to support himself and help his mother and sister, and had attended the equivalent of the modern business junior college. His first employment in this country was in Dixon, California. In 1874 he came to the town of Huene for a visit and stayed on as an employee, and later the partner of Moise Wolff, in a mercantile business. Mr. Levy sold out to Wolff in 1881 and later that year went to France. Here, in January of 1882, he married Lucy Levy, returning immediately with his bride to Huene where he entered the brokerage business. He bought and sold agricultural merchandise of all kinds, and it was through this that he obtained the seed and encouraged local farmers to raise lima beans on a commercial basis for food usage. He then set about to build up a market throughout the United States and in foreign areas for lima beans and was extremely successful in so doing. By the mid-1880's, his customers drew checks and drafts on him personally, which he then charged to their credit accounts. It was through this process that the banking business of A. Levy evolved.

By 1900 his activities in the financial field came to be known as Bank of A. Levy; and he then deemed his brother-in-law, Henry Levy, to have a working interest in the brokerage business. The firm of A. & H. Levy Company, a co-partnership, was therefore formed in which the senior partner was Achille Levy. That year an office was established in Oxnard, and in 1902 he built a building for the banking business at the corner of Fifth and B streets. Due to the passage of state laws regulating banks, it was necessary to incorporate. The corporate charter was granted on the twentieth day of July, 1905. The present banking quarters at the corner of Fifth and A streets in Oxnard were started in 1926, and have been occupied since May of 1927.

Some of the methods of Achille Levy seem almost incredible when compared with the rigid banking practices as prescribed by law today. The so-called "character loan" was an early method used by many bankers, and Mr. Levy was a veritable disciple of the system. Essen-





Bank of A. Levy, 1904.

tially quite simple, it only required that the applicant be known to be of good character (and usually well liked) by the banker, in which case money in large sums and with no collateral would be loaned. Contrariwise, if the person seeking money had thousands in collateral but was known to have character faults, not one cent would be forthcoming. Surprisingly enough, this method of loaning purely on the basis of character resulted in but few losses.

On one occasion, Mr. A. D. Russell of the Conejo had gone to Arizona to purchase cattle. It was during the panic of 1907, money was tight, and the sellers had no inclination to accept Mr. Russell's credit. A phone call was made to A. Levy in Oxnard. The gentleman's answer was a classic example of character banking. He authorized Mr. Russell to draw a draft in any amount and without any restrictions whatsoever; and he, A. Levy, would honor it.



It will be readily seen that the use of such methods could only be satisfactory between men whose word was as good as their bond. The verbal contract was used extensively in the early days and was considered as binding as any written contract. A. Levy often bought beans by this means, and the farmers knew they could depend upon receiving the price agreed upon.

The great financial panic of 1907 brought out many ingenious schemes on the part of rural bankers to carry their customers over the crisis. There were, of course, no federal agencies such as the Federal Reserve Bank to act as a balance wheel. In Ventura County the banks organized into an association, and in lieu of money issued script to their clients. Another point of interest was that the bank carried no paper money or pennies between 1907 and 1910. If a transaction required change of less than five cents, the customer took the breakage when the amount was three cents or over; and the bank was ahead if the amount was under three cents.

The history of the Bank of A. Levy has been closely joined with the agricultural and business progress of the community. As a consequence, it has been the bank's good fortune to make and keep a host of fine friends among its farmers and businessmen. The fact that there were no foreclosures during the lifetime of Achille Levy and only one after his death, speaks well for the principle of character banking. Even during the depression years of the 1930's, no customer was forced into foreclosure. In order to establish this remarkable record, the bank was obliged to borrow money to the extent of three times its capital to carry its borrowers over the hard times. More than one farmer offered to cooperate in foreclosure proceedings, but in every case he was told to go back to the farm and go to work.

Achille Levy was deeply interested in community activities, both as an individual and as head of the town's principal bank. He considered his financial house to be an integral part of the community life and as such owed an obligation to the town. Any worthwhile drive for funds, regardless of the sect or creed of the organization sponsoring such, was sure to receive the full cooperation of Mr. Levy.

The first board of directors included Alpha Adams, A. Camarillo, Charles Donlon, H. W. Hellman, James Leonard, A. Levy, Henry Levy, L. G. Maulhart, and W. M. Waterman. The list of original stockholders included the names of some of the most prominent pioneer families on the Oxnard Plain, a circumstance that is still true today.

The management of the bank was under the leadership of Achille Levy until his death in February of 1922, at which time his son, Joseph P. Levy, who had been in the employ of the bank since his graduation from Stanford University in 1911, was elected to the vacancy. Alpha Adams was the original cashier and served as such until his voluntary retirement in January of 1950, at which time he was also vice-president. Mr. Russell Carroll joined the staff in 1907 as bookkeeper and has been continuously with the bank since that time. His present position is that of cashier and vice-president.





Interior of the Bank of A. Levy, 1905.

Dr. Livingston's needs are being taken care of by Mr. Levy, while a Mr. McCoy is transacting business at the next window.

For one brief morning during the dark days of the depression, Mr. Carroll returned to character banking. Everyone knew that the banks would be closed on this particular morning, although the official notification in the form of a telegram had not been opened. Realizing that many of the best friends of Bank of A. Levy would be caught without ready cash, Mr. Carroll wrote his own personal check for \$200 and put the money in his pocket. The telegram was then opened and orders issued that the bank was to remain closed. Mr. Carroll went out on the streets of Oxnard and in sums of from five to twenty dollars doled out his money to old friends caught by the bank closing order. No notes were issued; all "business" was verbal. Mr. Carroll states that every cent was returned with the reopening of the banks. Achille Levy would have liked this manner of business.



# The Winter of 1861-1862

COMPILED BY THE STAFF

The influence of the weather upon the achievements of man is so commonplace that it is seldom referred to. Only when nature becomes perverse and changes the trend of the story, or is overly generous with her favors, does the historian begin to manifest interest. The classic example of the former was the drought of 1863-1864 that was to spell the end of the great ranchos. Strangely enough, only a short time before the citizens of California were literally floating from the worst deluge that the state has seen since its occupation by the Americans.

The winter of 1861-1862 has become almost legendary in California. Most of the early pioneers were in the habit of referring to the flood of 1884, and using it as their yardstick when evaluating later wet winters. The reason they did so was because few if any of them were here in 1862. Jefferson Crane had arrived in the Santa Clara Valley in the middle of November in 1861, but left before the severe portion of the winter began. He returned to the northern part of the state just in time to witness the catastrophic flood in the Sacramento Valley. Mr. Crane, however, left one interesting statement that helps in gaining a clearer overall picture of the winter as it affected this region: "When we left Marysville about November 10th, there had been no rain for some months. The country was brown and barren of all vegetation and roads were axle deep with dust from the team traffic to and from the mines. This section (the Santa Clara Valley) had been visited with heavy rains in early September and seasonable showers had followed. Consequently, here the scene was changed. The valley and the surrounding hills were clothed in their finest robes of green, the herds were luxuriating in the richest pasture and everything pointed toward prosperity . . ." <sup>1</sup> Crane's statement is pertinent in that it indicates the rainfall for the early part of the season in this section was far above average. It is a rare phenomena, indeed, to have the herds "luxuriating in the richest pasture" in Ventura County during the month of November.

The principal rainfall that was to make this the worst flood year in the history of southern California began on December 24, 1861. Yda Addis Stroke stated in her history of the county <sup>2</sup> that it rained for sixty consecutive days. E. M. Sheridan also made the same assertion in his county history published at a later date. <sup>3</sup> Neither gave any sources for the statement, and a perusal of the files of the Los Angeles *Star* would indicate that these claims are about 25% exaggerated. While the distance from Los Angeles to Ventura must taken into consideration, it is still close enough for all practical purposes. Let us follow this flood period through the files of the *Star*, a weekly newspaper, beginning with the issue of January 4, 1862:

"THE RAIN—It is only necessary to mention it—if that even, be of any consequence. But all we may say on this subject is, that there has



been one shower since our last publication, but it lasted all the time. Morning, noon, and night—day in and day out—it has been rain, rain, rain. In consequence, the prospects of the stock-owners are better than for many years before.”

The editor noted that the San Gabriel and Los Angeles rivers were flooding, while the San Diego correspondent wrote that “the weather has been very pleasant here with an abundance of rain.”

The primary concern of the *Star* at this early period of the flood was the interruption of the overland mail service from the north: “For nearly two weeks no mail has arrived from the north. Our great tri-weekly mail has proved a failure . . . Like the trans-continental route, the coast route hence to San Francisco is impracticable in winter. For two winters we had the stages by the Tulare route; and a few hours was the greatest detention. Now, we do not have any mails at all. We presume the present route will be continued, if it be desirable to the contractors, who will prefer to lay up for two or three weeks in the rainy season, rather than continue to work the animals dragging mail matter to an out-of-the-way cow county . . .

“We have lately been informed by a gentleman who traveled by the coast route, that it cannot be made available for travel during the winter months. The Salinas River is impassable for weeks at a time. In such rains as have fallen this year, it becomes dangerous, and at the crossing, quite impassable. This is not the only stream on the road which prevents wagons from crossing. And, indeed, the whole road has been denounced as unfit for travel, notwithstanding the praises showered upon it by interested parties . . .”

By the next issue of the *Star* on January 11th, the flood had begun to reach more serious proportions. The paper contained several short articles on damage and noted that: “We have had another week of almost incessant rain . . .” Interspersed with this pessimism was a rather forlorn item of hope: “Yesterday old Sol once more shone upon us, giving us hopes that the waters have for a time subsided. A little fair weather would be tolerable now.” Still in its early phases, the storm at this time was not without its brighter side: “The plains are now luxuriating in all the garniture of their spring attire . . .”

One story in this issue is of particular interest to Ventura County: “We understand the mail stage which arrived here on Sunday last, was floated down the Santa Clara River for some miles. The mail matter was thoroughly saturated. It is supposed an empty bag was floated off in the current.”

By now the great storm had been in progress for eighteen days without any appreciable letup. News from the northern part of the state indicated that conditions there were as bad or even worse than in southern California. The January 11th issue of the *Star* recorded unprecedented floods in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, with heavy destruction to property and livestock.

The following week, January 11-18, the rains appear to have lessened in intensity, but the continuity was maintained with monotonous reg-



ularity. The San Bernardino correspondent reported that the mud at Whiskey Point was "up to their—well none of your business!" After press time of Saturday the 18th, however, the climax to some twenty-five days of rainfall was reached. On January 25th, the *Star* described the deluge of the previous Saturday:

"THE RAIN—The rain commenced falling on the 24th of December and continued with but two slight interruptions until the morning of the 23rd of January. On Saturday last, torrents of water were precipitated on the earth—it seemed as if the clouds had broken through, and the waters over the earth and the waters under the earth were coming unto conjunction . . ."

"In the city, with the exception of the falling of a few old adobe buildings, there was no damage sustained . . ."

"The road from Tejon, we hear, has been almost washed away. The San Fernando mountain cannot be crossed, except by the old trail which winds around and passes over the top of the mountain. The plain has been cut up into gulches and arroyoes, and streams are rushing down every declivity."

It was reported that the entire town of Jarupa, with the exception of the church, had been washed away in the San Bernardino area. The raging Santa Ana River had made homeless 500 people in the town, and the only shelter for them was in the still undamaged church.

The editor even managed to insert a little humor into the now grim flood situation by reporting the story of a man in a horse and buggy that was swept away by the flood. This man, reported the *Star*, was able to save the animal and the wagon, but lost all the load except one or two kegs of liquor, "which evidently had no affinity for water."

The storm had now ended its fifth consecutive week with only a minor clearing spell on the 23rd and 24th of January. The brief interlude was accompanied by a cold wind and excessive frosts at night. The editor of the *Star* could not resist a bit of facetiousness and observed: "On Tuesday last, the sun made its appearance in the heavens, the phenomena lasted for some minutes, and was witnessed by a number of persons."

There was one person in Los Angeles who was not happy to have even a slight respite from the rain. Syriaco Arza was a convicted murderer and had been languishing in the city jail during the inclement weather, the sheriff apparently waiting for fair skies to carry out the death sentence. The 24th being the nearest thing to a clear day that Los Angeles had seen in a month, the sheriff took advantage of the situation to hang Arza in the jail yard. The paper noted that a sizeable crowd gathered outside the yard and on the adjacent hills to witness the sordid affair. Rain began falling again on the following day.

By February 1st, the full scope of the disaster over the state was becoming more and more apparent. The entire city of Sacramento was under water, and the legislature was forced to abandon the capitol and move to San Francisco for the duration of the session. The *Star*



for this date gives one of the few rainfall measurements to be found, 27.50 inches for the month of January at a small town in the Sierra foothills. "Every valley in the upper part of the State has been flooded and the loss of life and property has been unprecedented." Boats were reported as taking short-cuts over farms, telegraph poles, orchards, etc.<sup>4</sup> The city of San Francisco was lauded by the Los Angeles paper for her unselfish energies in flood relief activities; "Long may that noble city continue properous, indicating by her munificent charities, the proud title of Queen of the Pacific."

The February 1st issue carried this dispatch describing conditions in the Ventura region: "SANTA BARBARA—The effects of the flood have been disastrous in this locality, to an extent unknown to the oldest inhabitant, a venerable and well known individual in these parts. At San Buenaventura the torrent rushed through the town with such force, as to wash away the street to the depth of fifteen feet, carrying several houses with it. The town was abandoned, the people taking refuge in the church and other elevated places. In the valley, the grass, timber and lands have been destroyed, and eight or ten houses knocked to smash. The gardens which were so famous in the locality, were washed away, not a vestige being left. One man ran the risk of his life, having to wade waist deep carrying his wife and family to a place of safety. A man named Hewett<sup>5</sup> was drowned in one of the tributaries of the Santa Clara, the Cayetano Creek. He left home to go to some new mines which had lately been struck; finding the river impassible he with his companion, named Moore,<sup>6</sup> was on his way back to his family, and on passing the mouth of the creek, was unfortunately drowned. He leaves a wife and large family to deplore his loss.

"The roads from here to Santa Barbara, as on all the other lines of travel, have been so cut up and washed away, that one can pass along only on the hillsides, and that with great difficulty. It will be a long time and cost a great deal of labor, to make the roads fit for travel."

On February 8th, the *Star* published a one sentence resume of the flood: "As a matter of record, it may be as well to state, that from the 24th day of December to the 5th day of February, with the exception of two days, rain, more or less, has fallen every day and night,—sometimes in torrents."

The following week, February 15th, the paper was referring to the "late floods." Much of the alarming news in earlier issues was now being modified as more accurate accounts of flood damage were received. Nature, however, was still being very perverse. Temperatures all during the great storm had been warm; and despite the lack of sunshine, many of the deciduous trees had begun to bud out. Now that the storm was over, cold winds and heavy night frosts were the order of the day: "The weather during the week has been generally very cold, although the sun shone brightly mid-days. There were severe frosts at nights—Wednesday night, some hours of very heavy rain . . ." This weather pattern was to prevail for another sixty days, cold winds with



heavy frosts at night and a generous rain on the average of once a week.

By March the 8th, the stage carrying the mail arrived from San Francisco. It had been sixteen days enroute. The editor of the *Star* had long since mellowed his remarks concerning the coast route for the mails, for the Tulare route would have been fully as impossible on such a winter.

Late in March another week of rainfall began, although now the lower temperatures resulted in heavy snowfall in the mountains and less flooding of the valleys. These showers were not as continuous as the rains of January, but they appear from the descriptions in the *Star* to have added considerably to the rainfall totals. The snowfall in the mountains was described as particularly heavy. As late as April 12th the *Star* stated: "Wednesday we were visited with one of the severest rain and hail showers of the season." Considering what had been going on all winter, this was quite a statement. As if to make amends for all the water poured on the region, the weather now turned hot; and the great winter of 1861-1862 was over for all practical purposes.

How much rain actually fell during this momentous winter? The United States Weather Bureau did not come into existence until 1870, so we have no accurate figures available. In fact, there does not appear to be any rainfall figures of any kind for the Los Angeles area listed in the *Star* for this period. Nor are there any comparable years on record from which a reasonable estimate might be made. The nearest winter that even approached the intensity of rainfall of 1861-1862 was 1884, although the rainfall pattern in the latter year was altogether different. The season had been exceptionally dry in 1884 until the 26th day of January. From that date to the end of the season, some 40 inches were recorded in the Santa Clara Valley. The principal part of this fell between January 26th and the 20th of March. The duration of the main storms of the two flood years are, therefore, roughly comparable; although the continuity in 1884 was nowhere near as unbroken as in 1862. It would certainly be reasonable to assume that the amount of rain from the 24th of December, 1861, to February 5th, 1862, was equal to, if not in excess of, the fall between the 26th of January and the 20th of March in 1884. However, in attempting to arrive at an estimate, it must be remembered that in 1861 enough rain had fallen by mid-November that the "herds were luxuriating in the richest pasture." Further, there were a number of heavy rains in 1862 after the 5th of February when the great flood period ended. Taking all these factors into consideration, a reasonable estimate of the rainfall in 1861-1862 would be somewhere between 55 and 60 inches.

A repetition of such a storm period today would be nothing short of a major disaster. Southern California was so sparsely settled in the 1860's that large areas could have been under water with no loss of life or any particular damage to property. Today, many of these same areas support large urban populations or are devoted to specialty

farming crops. Thousands of acre feet of water that soaked into the ground in 1862 would fall upon roofs, streets, playgrounds and other man-made collecting agencies today. A conjunction of the "waters over the earth and the waters under the earth" would be a far different thing in 1962 than it was in 1862. It could happen.

#### NOTES

1. "The Narrative of Jefferson Crane," *Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. I, no. 2.

2. *A Memorial and Biographical History of the Counties of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Ventura, California*. Chicago, 1891.

3. *History of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Ventura Counties California*. Chicago, 1917.

4. Jefferson Crane reported sailing over the top of his uncle's peach orchard in this flood.

5. Storke and Sheridan spell this name Hewitt.

6. Probably T. Wallace More or one of his brothers.



## Miscellany

From the files of the *Ventura Signal*, 1878

Now is the time for emigrants to come to Southern California. The rains will soon set in and the man who comes now and procures for himself a small piece of land will soon make his money back and be secure in the possession of a home for himself and family. September 28.

The Ventura String Band were out serenading last Thursday night, soothing many a fair one to sleep with sweet music. October 5.

Our congressman, Hon. P. D. Wiggenton, has been an indefatigable worker for the interests of the people of his district. He has, by special efforts, secured an appropriation for a survey and sounding of the waters of this port preliminary to measures, which, carried out, will give us a breakwater. April 20.

It is said that a recent convert in Deadwood yelled "Keno!" in prayer meeting instead of amen. October 19.

No town in Southern California has brighter prospects than San Buenaventura . . . Loafers can do well here, owing to our genial climate, but we do not want them. A further supply would not be healthful. October 19.

Insolvency blanks are for sale at Bartlett Bros. Lawyers make a note of this. October 19.

It is quite probable that Mr. C. N. Baker, formerly proprietor of "Twelve Mile House" will shortly take charge of the Santa Paula Hotel. October 19.

The Total value of all assessed property in Ventura County after equalization is \$3,270,051. October 19.

The new cemetery laid off by G. G. Sewell into lots 18 feet square, is selling very rapidly at \$10 per lot. Who says Santa Paula has no burying ground. November 16.

T. R. Bard offers desirable lands for rent or lease on the ranchos Canada Larga, Colonia and Simi. No doubt a large acreage of this land will be seeded this season. November 9.

A railroad from Newhall down the Santa Clara valley to the sea is the great want of Ventura county, and until a communication of this kind is opened up through our county we do not expect any rapid improvement in the aspects of affairs and times. November 2.

Journalism is still rude in Nevada. The editor of the *Austin Reville* speaks of the editor of the *Reno Gazette* as "that no-headed bean pole," and this is the retort: "Gently, small one, for it would be a source of everlasting regret should we accidently mash the other half of you into your boots." November 2.

## Membership

### LIFE

Mrs. Edith Hoffman  
Mrs. Grace Smith  
Mrs. Robert G. Haley  
Walter Wm. Hoffman

### SUSTAINING

Adolfo Camarillo  
Richard Bard  
Mrs. Walter H. Duval  
A. C. Hardison  
Mr. and Mrs. Milton M. Teague

## Half a Century of Service

*Ventura County Mutual Fire Insurance Co.* Organized on April 4, 1898 with E. P. Foster, president; Nathan Blanchard, vice-president and Charles Barnard, secretary. This old Ventura County business firm has faithfully followed the high standards set by its pioneer founders.

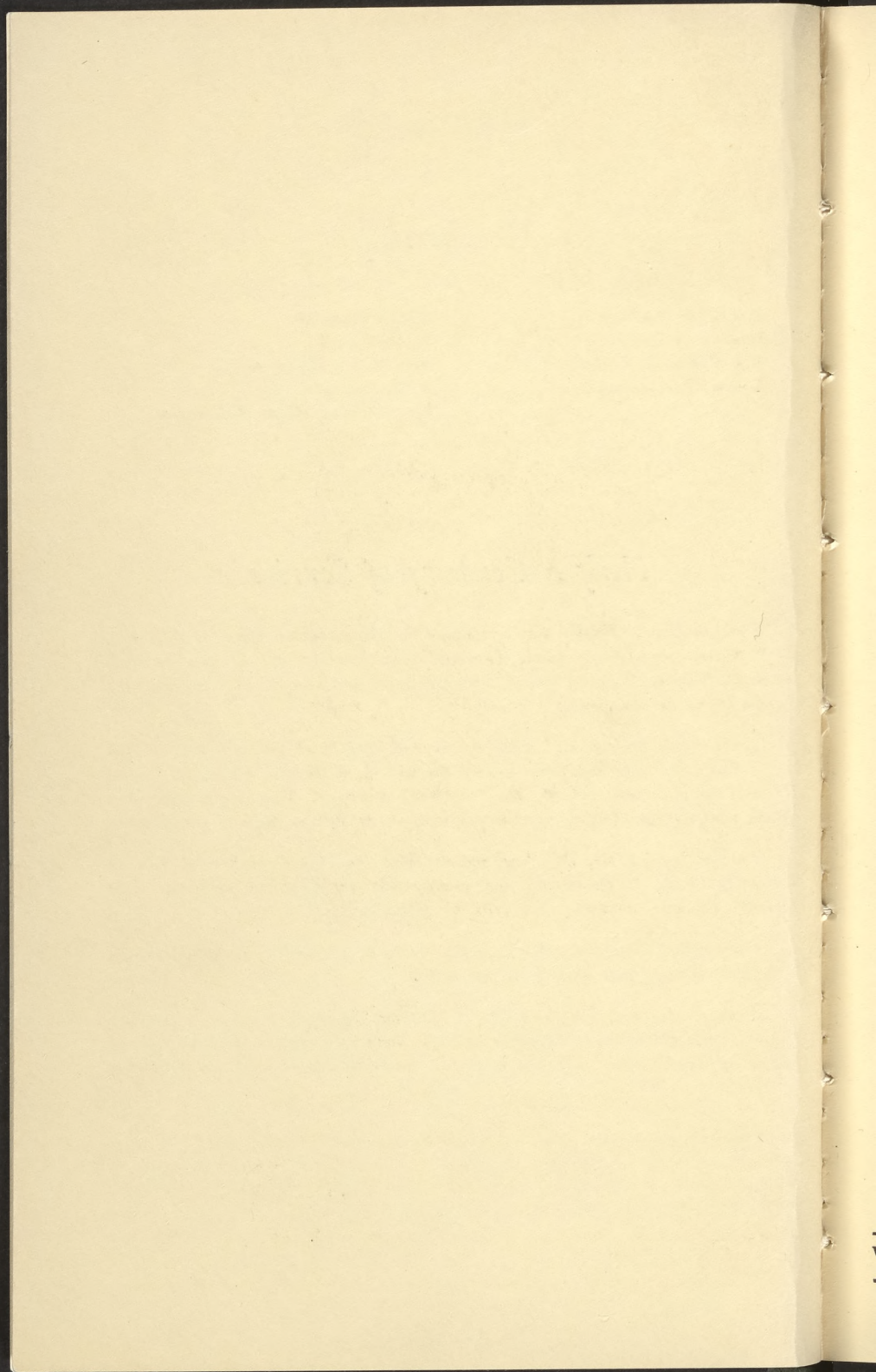
*Santa Paula Savings and Loan Association.* Organized in April 1890 as the Santa Paula Building and Loan Association with J. R. Haugh, president; Caspar Taylor, vice-president and H. H. Youngken, secretary. This organization has served the interests of home owners and builders, as well as those of the investor.

*Peoples Lumber Co.* This firm was organized in 1890 by a host of Ventura County pioneers. It has served the construction needs of its founders, their descendants, and countless thousands of newcomers.

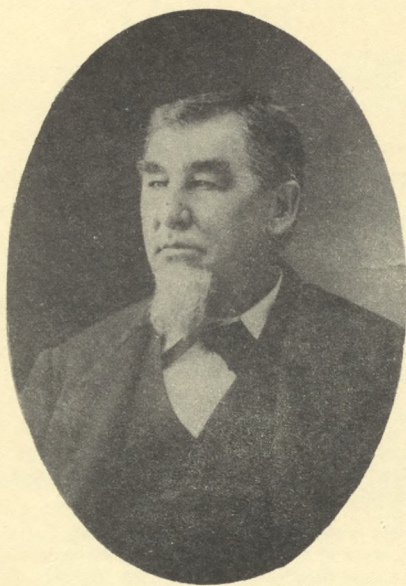
*County Stationers, Inc.,* 532 E. Main, Ventura. Since 1898 Ventura County's complete stationer and office furniture dealer.

*Bank of A. Levy,* 143 W. Fifth St., Oxnard. Founded in 1900 by the late Achille Levy, who came to Hueneme in 1875. Since its inception Bank of A. Levy has been closely allied with the farm and ranch industries of Ventura County.





*The*  
VENTURA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
*QUARTERLY*



J. Y. Saviers

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# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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The Ventura County Historical Society's headquarters is the Pioneer Museum, 77 North California Street, Ventura, California. There are three classes of membership—active, \$5 per year, sustaining, \$25 per year and life, \$100.

The QUARTERLY is published in February, May, August and November from the Society's headquarters at the Pioneer Museum. The editorial staff is composed of Chas F. Outland, Chairman, Mrs. D. A. Cameron, Mrs. C. R. Nieland, Grant Heil and Robert Pfeiler.

The Society assumes no responsibility for the statements or opinions of authors of various articles. All communications should be addressed to the Society at the Pioneer Museum. Memberships include subscription to the QUARTERLY. Additional copies are available at \$1.00 each.

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# The Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly

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VOL. IV, NO. 2

FEBRUARY, 1959

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## You Too Can Contribute

Three and one-half years ago the writer assumed the responsibility of editing the *Quarterly* for the newly organized Ventura County Historical Society. Knowing absolutely nothing about the publication business we nevertheless accepted the assignment, albeit with considerable uneasiness. Then we went to work contacting our more experienced friends around the state who, by virtue of the fact they had once been in the same dilemma, were in a position to offer us sound advice. Invariably, these people told us the difficult part of the undertaking would be encountered at the beginning, particularly in respect to securing material suitable for publication in an historical quarterly such as we visualized. The experience of other societies, we were told, was that once the project was successfully launched the editor would find himself so deluged with manuscripts he would find it difficult to politely reject those that he did not find acceptable. We have had fun and many headaches in three and one-half years, but never have we been overwhelmed with historical articles from the many oldtimers (or anyone else) of the county who are perfectly qualified to contribute entertaining and educational material.

The continuing success of any organization depends almost wholly upon the active participation of the membership. One of the prime objectives of an historical society should be an energetic publication program; and if this program is to be realized, it is essential that those possessing the necessary ability and knowledge take the time to write and submit their stories for future publication. Putting one's memoirs or early recollections into writing can be a pleasurable and stimulating experience. We cordially invite, yes urge, our many members who can write interesting stories of an earlier day to send them to us.



# Pictographs at Burro Flats

By CHARLES E. ROZAIRE

In several mountainous sections of Ventura County are small caves containing multicolored drawings of the former Indian inhabitants of the area. One outstanding group of these pictographs, as they are called by archaeologists, is found in the sandstone formations around Burro Flats in the Simi Hills south of Santa Susana on property now controlled by North American Aviation, Inc. Access to the area is restricted at present because of atomic research and rocket engine development being carried on for the U.S. Government.

At least four shelters in the vicinity have been located with drawings associated and one of these has a spectacular array which almost completely covers the interior walls (see photograph). The other caves contain only from two to five individual sketches consisting of circle designs, simple interesting line figures, a human-like figure with arms akimbo and legs upturned, and a horse. The colors of the paintings in these three caves include a grayish mauve, white and red. A circle with radiating lines was scratched into the back of one overhang.

The main pictograph cave is located within the truncated series of sandstone deposits which form a small canyon running south several hundred yards down from the Flats above. The shelter is an elongate erosional slit measuring fifteen feet long, five and one half feet deep, and about four feet high. Though the ceiling and portions of the back wall are smoke-blackened, the floor is bare rock devoid of any camping debris that would indicate habitation. However, about fifty feet below is a long shallow overhang with an occupation midden of late prehistoric date extending over an area of some 2,500 square feet. Several bedrock mortar holes are on the southern and eastern edges of the site. The abundance of oaks in the canyon was probably one of the major attractions for the Indians to live here.

The paintings in the main pictograph cave were done in black, white, red, orange, pink, and blue with red and white occurring most often. The red is an iron oxide. The white is probably derived from calcined shell, while the black is fine soot or lampblack. It is not certain as to the constituents of the other colors, nor have tests been made to determine if oils or fats were mixed in. It is known that at least some of the pigments were prepared by grinding as is evidenced by three small depressions which served as paint mortars in the floor of the shelter. These holes are distinct from a series of pecked dots forming lines at the bottom of the back wall.

The superimpositions of drawings would seem to indicate three different periods, but the difficult job of carefully and methodically delineating each feature to sort out all the design elements into the separate phases has not been done as yet. Mr. Charles La Monk, an artist who is doing extensive work in making accurate reproductions of pictographs throughout southern California, noted that the earliest



paintings were done in black on an originally buff-colored, natural surface. Extensive fires were evidently built causing the interior to be covered with soot which became bonded to the walls. Then a new series of drawings was made with white and red colors predominant. There followed another burning within the cave covering everything with a second layer of soot. This last coating has broken down and weathered away in many places exposing more clearly the second period drawings. Paintings of the final phase cover the second layer of soot. They are more elaborate and include the whole range of colors.

The dating of these three periods can only be very speculative at present. Drawings on large bare rock afford little in the way of associations which are necessary to tie in archaeological features that occur in more easily datable superimposed strata of middens. The design elements are distinct from what few incised or painted objects are found in the deposits of southern California sites. This situation also makes it difficult to relate with certainty the pictographs to specific sites, though close proximity is taken to be the strongest link between the two. However, there is one hope for the dating of this cave by submitting the soot to radiocarbon analysis, if there are sufficient quantities for such tests. For the present it is estimated that the earliest markings would not be more than several thousand years old and the latest date would be measured in terms of several hundred years up to the time of Spanish contact. If the drawing of the horse (the only unstylized naturalistic representation) is really aboriginal, it would have to be of the historic period.

The exact meaning and significance of these drawings to the Indians of this area will probably never be known for certain since they died out or forgot their old ways before questions pertaining to the paintings could be asked. We can only infer from information derived from accounts given by Indians in other regions. To the south among the Luiseño, drawings were made at the conclusion of puberty rites when a race was run to a particular spot and a painting was made on reaching the place. Paintings associated with puberty rites have a wide distribution, occurring as far north as Puget Sound. Among the groups in Tulare county some of the pictographs are believed to be "doctor's marks" which represented shamans' powers. Various naturalistic representations in the western states have been hypothesized as representing clan symbols, individual guardian spirits, or magical signs to insure success in the hunt. It must be remembered, however, that in large part these interpretations can only be guesses.

In the main cave there are two human-like stick figures (see drawing) which are more elaborate, each with a "headdress" of radiating lines around the head. Similar long, spindling projections are found in the ceremonial headgear used in the Big Head Dance of the Western Wintun in north-central California.<sup>1</sup> Also in this dance long flicker feather bands dangle down the back of the performer, and the elongate oval with radiating lines adjacent to one figure adds to the striking similarity. One of the figures has a series of pendant lines

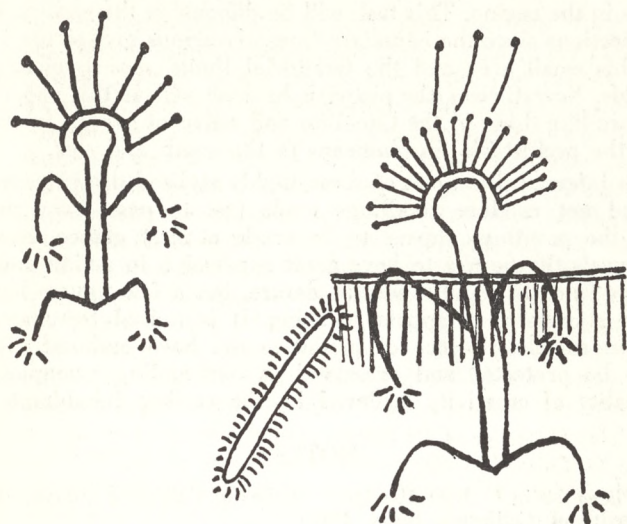




Portion of the back wall of the main pictograph at Burro Flats.

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Representations of human figures, possibly in ceremonial costume, from the main pictograph at Burro Flats.

drawn across the arm area, reminiscent of the feathered wing portions of the Pueblo Eagle Dance costume, and incidentally a feature lacking in the southern California Eagle Dance. A connection with the two widely scattered places to the north and east is not necessarily suggested, but rather, these traits are mentioned to indicate the possibility that here we have a hint of some type of elaborate ceremonial regalia worn on certain religious occasions. The two figures could also represent supernatural beings, but again one can only guess.

The pictographs at Burro Flats are characteristic of those in the west-central coast ranges of Santa Barbara, Kern, Los Angeles, and Ventura counties,<sup>2</sup> particularly in such forms as circles, segmented



worms or centipedes, and stick-like anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures. Some of the latter are suggestive of lizards or water skippers.

At this time it is not possible to associate the pictures discussed here with the historic groups which occupied the area because there have been no extensive detailed distribution studies of the many pictograph locations in the region. This task will be difficult in the eastern Ventura County sections since the boundary lines of various groups are involved within this small area and the territorial limits were probably never very stable. Nevertheless, the pictographs dealt with in this paper appear to be more like those of the Canaliño and adjacent groups in the north than of the prehistoric Shoshoneans to the south and east.

It is inferred that most of these highly stylized drawings are symbolic and not random doodlings made just to pass away the time. Though the paintings appear to be crude at first glance, continuous study reveals the figures to have great expression in action and mood. The latter tends to be of a serious nature, but a few figures have such awkward stances as to appear amusing. It is indeed fortunate for us that these excellent pieces of primitive art have endured. They deserve to be protected and preserved as outstanding examples of the high quality of creativity achieved by the earliest inhabitants of the county.

#### NOTES

1. See Plates 2-8 in C. Hart Merriam's *Studies of California Indians*. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1955)
2. The most comprehensive book to date on the pictographs of California is Julian H. Steward's *Petroglyphs of California and Adjoining States*. (University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, volume 24, no. 2. 1929. Berkeley.)



# Cheerful Yesterdays and Confident Tomorrows

By J. H. MORRISON

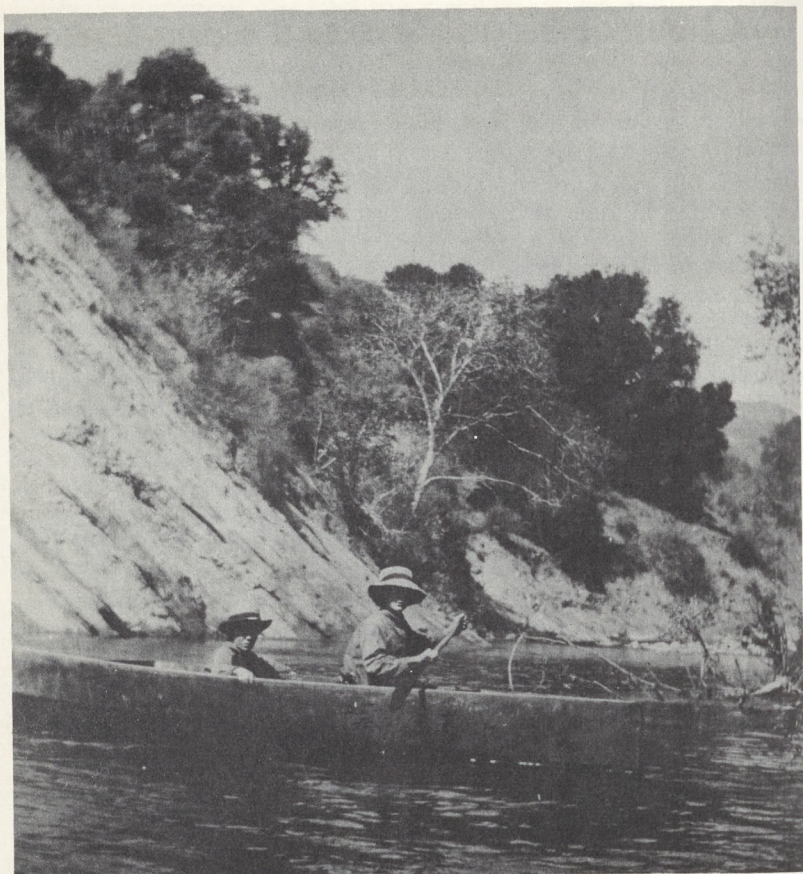
California had celebrated her thirty-fifth birthday when my parents reached San Francisco toward the end of September, 1885. They had married in June at Inverness, Scotland; and my father, who had spent twelve years as a coffee planter on the Island of Ceylon, did not want to take his bride to the tropics. Incidentally, while in Ceylon he was associated with the late M. W. P. Wright, who came to Ventura about 1892 and later was a pioneer landowner in the Moorpark district. Ten years after completion of its line through Antelope Valley, the Southern Pacific Railway was busily advertising the sale of its sectional grants throughout the British Isles. A fast talking representative in the London office apparently convinced my father that Antelope Valley was truly a Garden of Eden, lacking only the serpent.

Now the most cheerful of all my yesterdays was the day my parents visited the San Francisco Mechanics Fair and were attracted to the Ventura County exhibit. This was two years prior to my arrival, but I have been and will continue to be grateful to Nehemiah Blackstock and Col. S. R. Thorpe who were in charge of the Ventura County display. Mr. Blackstock was the father of Superior Judge Chas. F. Blackstock; Col. Thorpe was father of the late Carlyle Thorpe, for many years head of the California Walnut Growers Association.

At any rate, armed with letters to E. P. Foster, L. C. McKeeby, A. D. Barnard and others, plus the information that they were about to visit the "garden spot of the world" (I think Mr. Thorpe said that) they boarded the S. S. Los Angeles for a very uncomfortable voyage which eventually landed them at the Ventura wharf. Mr. Barnard took them to Saticoy, Santa Paula and Nordhoff (Ojai). At Gally Cottages they had their first watermelon and corn-on-the-cob, neither of which they knew how to eat until shown by Dr. Gally. Through Mr. Barnard they bought a thirty acre apricot orchard from John T. Stone, one of the founders of Ventura County, on Ventura Avenue. My mother lived in that house for sixty years. Two or three years after her death, the property was sold to Shell Chemical Corporation whose plant now covers the thirty acres. The place would be unrecognizable were it not for the "Crooked Palm Tree" which was planted by one Dinsmore about 1870, and is now an Avenue landmark.

Prior to the coming of the railroad in 1887, Ventura County could only be reached by steamer or stage, a semi-isolation which no doubt accounted for its being little affected by the boom period of the middle 1880's. The boom, if there was a boom here, was confined to the sale of town lots, agricultural lands being practically unaffected. About 1890 farm values began to move up so that by 1894 my father, who had paid \$4000 for his thirty acres, sold eighteen acres for \$6000, a sum which in those cheerful yesterdays was a small fortune.





Ventura River scene, 1902.  
Morrison brothers in home made canoe.

How kind the neighbors were to this inexperienced Scottish couple who, as time went on, gained experience but remained Scots to the end. My mother's father was an attorney who entered local politics about 1850 and served as Lord Provost of Inverness for some 45 years. My father was born in the Free Church of Scotland manse in the village of Urganahart (don't try to pronounce the word, only a Scotsman can do it correctly) where his father served as minister from 1845 to 1895. So it is not surprising that cooking and farm work were as new to them as piloting a jet plane would be to us—most of us at any rate. However, with the help of Mrs. J. R. Myers, Grandma Hubbard, Mrs. A. D. Barnard, Mrs. N. B. Smith and other neighbors, my mother mastered the vagaries of a No. 8 Eureka wood stove. Maybe it was a Medallion stove, but whatever the name a good many of my not-so-cheerful-yes-



terdays were spent in refilling the wood box to satisfy its inordinate appetite for fuel. The men helped my father in getting horses, farm implements, a cow, chickens and pigs, so by the time I put in an appearance both house and farm were on a fairly even keel. Of those living in the Sleepy Hollow district in 1885, I believe that Henry Sparks, then a young boy, is the sole survivor.

It is difficult to pin childhood recollections to specific dates, but I'd say that mine begin in 1891 when I was four years old. At that time it was thought that apricots could not be dried in this section by sun heat, the fruit being dried in a specially built fruit drier or shipped to Newhall where there was plenty of sunshine. We had one of three or four such driers on Ventura Avenue, and I spent most of the July days listening to the girls who pitted fruit singing songs of the period. The singing of "My Darling Nellie Gray" always made me cry, so the girls sang it several times a day. The picking crew was made up of Chinese, pretty much the same crew each year under a foreman named Ah Ho. These men were very kind to me, taught me to use chop sticks, which so fascinated me that I insisted on using them at the home table, though they were ill adapted to breakfast porridge and evening soup.

In 1892 or thereabout, J. R. Myers and Alf Comstock set up a fruit camp in Canada Larga where apricots were dried in the sun, thus putting an end to heat dryers which were both expensive and unsatisfactory because of uneven drying. Some thirty years later I was getting a shoe-shine when an old Chinese came in to the cigar stand. He made his purchase, looked up at me, stopped and said, "You Mollison boy, I work you' father long time, you little boy then, me Ah Ho, you know me?" I certainly did not recognize him, and how on earth did he know me after thirty years? For many years our California Chinese were a big part of those cheerful yesterdays.

On April 25, 1891 my father took me to the Southern Pacific station to see and hear President Benjamin Harrison who was touring the nation. I was much more interested in the locomotive and the cars than in the President. By the time the 1896 McKinley-Bryan campaign rolled around, I was old enough to know that it was quite a battle. At Whitton's candy store one could buy all day suckers with Bryan's picture wrapped in silver and McKinley's in gold foil. The gold foil appealed to me, so since 1896 I have been a Republican—and I might add that I am glad I am writing about cheerful *yesterdays*, since November 4th, at any rate.

The Rose Flour Mill, operated by Robert Orten, was situated a quarter mile south of our place. Built about 1876, the mill ran by water power provided by a flume which took water from the Ventura River just west of the present City Water Department reservoirs. This flume ran through a number of farms, the land owners in return for the easements granted, being permitted to use such water as they might need for domestic and agricultural purposes. From time to time the flume was closed for repairs, which meant that we had a field day



catching fish marooned by the shutdown. The fish were, for the most part, inedible, but we had a lot of fun anyway. The mill warehouse was in demand for dances, amateur theatricals, cake-walks and so on. When a Saturday night dance was to be held, it was the job of Lucius Orton, Dan Fraser and myself to shave wax candles onto the floor and spend most of the day dragging a bale of sacks over it so that it would be "slick" for the dancing. Mrs. Orton kept us at it by supplying home made root beer. The Mill School District got its name from the flour mill, and though it later developed that the mill was in the Avenue School District, the name has not been changed.

Immediately south of the mill was the dynamo, also water-powered, which furnished power for the carbon-arc lights in Ventura. These lights were almost wholly used at street intersections, but I believe that the Hotels Anacapa and Rose each had an arc light in the lobby. The dynamo operated only from 6 P.M. until midnight, and for a time did not run at all during the full moon period of the month. The shallow mill pond furnished a fine swimming-hole which we small boys shared with Mrs. Orton's ducks until we graduated to Big Rock, Mays, Dumond's, or any one of several deep pools along the river. The accompanying photo was taken back of our property, and it is hoped that any who read this will be convinced that at one time there *was* water and plenty of it, in the Ventura River. Fishing? On opening day the river banks were lined with fishermen from Ortega's to the ocean, and most of them were home with the limit (in those days, 50 fish) before noon. In the early morning and late evening there was good duck hunting, and shooting quail on the Taylor Ranch was almost like taking candy from a baby.

I entered Mill School in September, 1892, a one room school for eight grades, where I was put in the second grade as I had learned to read and write at home. The pupils ranged in age from  $5\frac{1}{2}$  to 18 years. Most of the older boys could only attend during the winter when there was no ranch work. The school term ran from about the middle of September to May 15, so we had four months vacation plus, as I recall, a week at Christmas. Those barefoot summer days were ushered in by the Caledonian Picnic, held on the portion of the Ayers Ranch which is now Foster Park. A bicycle race from the Rose Hotel to Casitas started the day, followed by a program of field and track events, all enlivened by the skirl of bagpipes played by the Walkers from, I believe, Carpinteria. The Caledonia Society was a rather prominent organization whose members numbered names such as Cerf, Hartzfeldt, O'Hara, Kauffman, Donovan, Bernheim, and others whose forebears probably reached Scotland as members of the Roman Legions. There were also Frasers, Strathearns, MacGregors, Morrisons, Shiells, Camerons and Campbells on the roster. John Dewar, Messrs Haig and Haig, John Weldon and other non-members, attended every picnic.

By 1897, my father decided to return "home"—intending to stay there—so in April we started for Scotland, arriving about May 1. Never will I forget the beauty of the hawthorn hedges in full bloom



which lined the tracks on both sides from Southhampton to London where at Waterloo Station, we were met by my uncle, complete with frock coat and silk hat. Twelve years in Ceylon and ten in California must have thinned by father's blood. Two bleak, raw Scottish winters were enough; so in October, 1899, the Morrisons set sail for Ventura. For two years I had attended Elgin Academy where, at the age of 10, I got a thorough grounding in Latin, algebra, geometry, English and French. Those two years at the Academy are definitely *not* among the most cheerful of my yesterdays. If a Scots child was spoiled, the fault did not lie with the teacher—there was no sparing of the rod. However, the wonderful summers spent in the Highlands of Rosshire and Sutherlandshire in company with a number of cousins, more than made up for the aches and pains of school life. The acre after acre of "bonnie purple heather," the brilliant yellow broom, the colorful wild rhododendron; these I can see in my minds eye even after a lapse of sixty years.

We returned to Los Angeles by the southern route, stopping over to see the sights of Washington, D. C.; but my one vivid recollection of the trip is buying huge bananas for ten cents a dozen from negro women at the Mobile railroad station. There was also the comfort of a bath at the old Natick House in Los Angeles after five days and nights behind a coal burning locomotive.

As the Santa Barbara local (via Santa Paula in those days) came to the east boundary of the Dixie Thompson ranch, we had our first view of the Pacific Ocean and about 11 A. M. reached Ventura. The small city of 3000 had changed little in two years; the Henning building at Main and California streets had been razed and the site occupied by the Collins-Taylor building, housing the Bank of Wm. Collins and Sons. Otherwise, Main Street was about as we had left it, and the area east of Ash Street was pretty much open country. A neighbor had met the train so mother and the two small boys went home with him, while father and I climbed aboard one of Sifford's Express wagons, into which Bill Quinlin (known as Pumpkin Bill) loaded our boxes and trunks for the five mile trip up Ventura Avenue. Our return must have been heralded in advance, for I can recall the many greetings given us as we drove down Main Street. One in particular was that of Mrs. Joseph Roth, who was standing in front of their "Popular Shoe Star" as we came along. She ran into the street, stopped the team and, no mean feat for a rather stout elderly lady, got up to the wagon seat and threw her arms around us. Sure the return of five Morrisons meant ten or twelve pairs of shoes a year, but I know that Mrs. Roth's welcome came from the heart. It is such things that make for cheerful yesterdays, the yesterdays when Ventura was a friendly little city in which one knew almost every man, woman and child, a place where people were accepted for what they were rather than for their financial standing.

Sunday School picnics at Casitas or Camp Comfort were red letter days for Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists in late



May and early June. Each denomination chose a different Saturday so that most of us were able to attend all three picnics. Because of the numerous springs in both locations, there was a profusion of mariposas, California poppies, hare-bell and yucca. Every small gully was green with ferns; maidenhair, gold-back, five-fingered and bracken, and occasionally one found a wild tiger-lilly. Usually two or three small boy show-offs managed to fall into San Antonio or Coyote creeks, mid laughter from the girls they were trying to impress.

Like most country towns, a large share of business was done on credit and by barter. Most ranchers paid their bills when their principal crop had been sold, and if crops had been poor or prices low the banks and merchants extended credit for another year. The small farmer brought produce: butter, eggs and so on to his grocer in exchange for foodstuff, settling the account at the end of the year. Our first set of bathroom fixtures was installed by a plumber who took an order on a grocer with whom my father had a credit balance; we got the fixtures, the plumber got his groceries, the merchant disposed of his wares, so all concerned were satisfied.

Of the stores which lined Main Street from California to the Avenue in the 1890's, only two are being operated today by the family of the original owner. These are Hirschfelders Shoe Store, founded in 1878, and Peirano's Grocery which has been in the same location since Alex Gandolfo, a great uncle of the present owners, first opened the doors eighty years ago.

Our merchants were prosperous and business was a pleasure, even if it did demand a 72 hour week. We used gold and silver coins, the nickel being the smallest denomination (though pennies could be had from the banks or postoffice) and currency of any kind was looked on with suspicion. Our morals were looked out for by six churches, though perhaps their influence was to some extent offset by the 15 saloons in town. The teen age club of the '90s was in the home, the school, and the church; and probably we of the period were, basically not much different from the young people of today. Despite dire predictions, most of us grew up to become reasonably good citizens, and I am sure that most of the present crop will do likewise. So, while looking back on Cheerful Yesterdays we may look forward with confidence to Tomorrow.



## Oxnard . . .

### A Social History of the Early Years

by VERNA BLOOM

In 1837 eight soldiers in the Mexican army received a grant of land from Governor Alvarado in what is now Ventura County south of the Santa Clara River to the ocean and west of a line running north from Point Mugu. From the settlement and colonization of these soldiers, the rancho became known as *Rancho El Rio de Santa Clara O'La Colonia*. It contained over 48,000 acres of level, fertile land extending six or seven miles from the ocean to the hills. After American settlers came in about 1867, business developed at New Jerusalem (El Rio) at Springville, and at Hueneme, which became the shipping port for barley and beans.

On the future site of Oxnard was the Saviers ranch. As early as 1878 there were 318 acres under cultivation and a comfortable ranch house. There were rows of blue gums and one row of pepper trees all around the ranch. The workshops and other buildings made it look almost like a village. Forty acres were fenced and one hundred bearing fruit trees, yellow belle-flowers, and other varieties made an orchard. In the ranch yard were fruits, flowers, ornamental shrubs, and a rose tree. The barn, forty-eight by seventy feet, was the largest in the county and would hold ninety tons of hay and stable thirty-eight horses. Another stable accommodated more horses and stock. A granary held 25 centals of grain and another building held one hundred sacks of barley. A shed twenty-one by forty feet housed three headers, two reapers, a separator, etc. Workers were lodged in a twelve by sixteen foot house. Eight to ten men were employed all year and thirty more during threshing. The Saviers' home place was the center for ranching activities covering twelve hundred acres in the Colonia and the Simi. Mrs. Saviers had four hundred young orange trees which she planned to bud with Mediterranean Sweets and Navel oranges. She had eighty thousand blue gums, nicely boxed and ready to ship, was raising eastern roses, and had six hundred Monterey Cypress for sale.

The country around the Oxnard townsite included some of the richest agricultural land in the world. The Patterson ranch, just southwest, sold \$58,000 worth of lima beans in 1897. It was a 6,000 acre horse ranch and raised barley, lima beans, grain, sugar beets, pumpkins, and potatoes. In the dry year of 1898, this ranch was able to care for sheep from Santa Barbara and Los Angeles counties and carried its own stock through. Artesian wells and an irrigation ditch from the Santa Clara River made crops and pasture possible.

In the old days the water level was right at the surface. There was a tule pond just north of the present boundary of Oxnard that drained into a low place where C Street now runs. It cut across to



Fifth Street about where F Street is today and drained into a ditch across the Hill ranch to another pond near the intersection of Ventura and Wooley roads. There was a four or five acre lake there at times that some years lasted all summer. Flocks of from two to six hundred geese were often sighted. The last large flock to be seen contained about two hundred birds and was about where the Catholic Church now stands.

Sugar beets were mentioned as early as 1891 in the *Hueneme Herald*. Claus Spreckles was interested, and Senator Clark of Montana investigated the region. Thomas R. Bard had large holdings in the Simi and Las Posas acquired from the immense Thomas R. Scott Estate and wanted a factory near Somis. The American Sugar Beet Company controlled by Henry T. Oxnard and Robert Oxnard, brothers, had a sugar factory at Chino. Farmers in the district were hearing about sugar beets, and one in particular became extremely interested. Albert Maulhardt could talk of nothing else and persuaded many farmers to try sugar beets. He went as far as Carpinteria to talk to farmers, and he went up to San Francisco to see Oxnard. In an advertisement in an 1896 *Hueneme Herald*, A. Levy announced that he had received beet seed and planters from Chino, and requested farmers to come get seed to try it. Experts from Chino came up to advise them. The year before a few test plots had been planted and the beets found to be very good. Enough were raised in 1896 to be hauled to Montalvo by team and shipped to Chino. In 1897 the Oxnard brothers built a beet dump at Montalvo.

According to the *Hueneme Herald* of July 8, 1897, the average yield of sugar beets in the valley would be thirteen and one-half tons to the acre. On July 29th the *Herald* reported the farmers organizing into a Ventura Beet Growers Union with T. A. Rice, President; G. E. Kaltmeyer, Treasurer; A. F. Maulhardt, Secretary; and Justin Petit, J. J. Hill, and Jacob Maulhardt, a committee on business. On September 23rd receipts at Montalvo were 225 tons a day. The Oxnards were so grateful to Albert Maulhardt that they made him their Ventura County manager, and paid him \$125 a month for years.

On November 4th, Henry Oxnard announced that a factory for the district was assured, that 200 men would be put to work immediately, and that a night gang would work under electric lights. He was certain that at least 10,000 acres would be subscribed, and he had acquired 3,000 acres in Pleasant Valley to run as a factory ranch.

The logical place for the factory seemed to be Hueneme with its shipping facility and the rich back country, but the Hueneme Wharf Company (Bard, Perkins, and Salisbury) refused to give Oxnard a right-of-way. When Oxnard did not get the concessions he wanted in Hueneme he said, "By God! I'll put it out in the fields where the farmers are." The usual reason given for Bard's refusal is that he did not want the town ruined by a factory element. In fact, in November of 1897 just after Oxnard had announced his factory, Bard was writing to John P. Green, a lawyer for Scott's estate, about plans for a sugar





Patterson Ranch scene, 1890's.

factory in the Las Posas and about contacts with H. E. Huntington and Chief Engineer Hood of the Southern Pacific Railroad to get them to build their road into the Las Posas, and was suggesting that they build their road from Oxnard's factory to the Hueneme wharf. Much of the letter concerned the right-of-way the Wharf Company had given Oxnard because they were forced into it. Oxnard had bought an old starch factory located about a mile east of the wharf as an outlet to the ocean for drainage from the factory, but the site was also a possible spot for a second wharf. Bard was concerned that in some way they had overlooked this property and were forced to give in to Oxnard and strengthen their wharf for beet cars. In return for the right-of-way, they demanded an agreement from Oxnard that he would not build another wharf. In 1901 the Hueneme Wharf Company rented the wharf to Henry T. Oxnard and seems to have given up any further consideration of a factory at Hueneme or elsewhere.



The new factory site was on 175 acres on the east side of Saviers Road bought at \$175 an acre from T. A. Rice. The Oxnard Construction Company began building in December of 1897. In November a man was looking for gravel beds, a steam cement mixer arrived, and the Southern Pacific Railroad began a temporary line from Montalvo through the river bed to get equipment to the factory site. It took 900 carloads of machinery to construct the factory. The first railroad trestle was a wooden pile bridge built in a hurry to get the heavy machinery across. For years, until the main line was built through Oxnard, trains came up to Montalvo and then backed on a spur track to Oxnard. The trestle went out the next spring on the first freshet. The wagon bridge across the Santa Clara was built in 1898 at the same time the railroad was putting in their first permanent trestle. The dedication of the vehicular bridge was a gay event with crowds of people in their best clothes, and a daughter of a supervisor driving a golden stake. The bridge cost \$32,000, was paid for in one year, and lasted until 1932.

The construction company and the factory people stayed at the Seaside Hotel in Hueneme while the factory was building and things were lively. Construction was completed in 1898 but not in time for the beet crop of that year. Beets were again shipped to Chino.

The only houses near the new factory were Jack Hill's place, (now the Catholic Women's Club) the Charlie Thacker place, and the Saviers home near the present depot. The factory people built a two story barn-like structure to house from forty to sixty men on the south side of East Fifth Street. To celebrate the beginning of actual construction, there was a big barbecue on February 5, 1898, on the factory grounds.

The Colonia Improvement Company laid out a townsite called Bayard on 300 acres bought by Oxnard for \$46,453 from Aranetta and J. G. Hill according to Ventura County records. It extended from Wooley Road on the south to the alley of Magnolia Boulevard on the north and from Saviers Road on the east to F Street on the west. Jack Hill held one-third of the stock while J. A. Driffl, president of the company, was the chief stockholder. The streets, all eighty feet wide, running north and south were named alphabetically from A to F, and those east and west were numbered. Each business lot had a 25 foot frontage and a depth ranging from 110 to 140 feet. All residence lots were 50 by 140 feet and all had an alley in the rear. The checker-board plan with the houses all facing east and west failed immediately because business located on Fifth Street faced north and south leaving the alleys parallel to the business blocks. Later half block alleys were cut through behind the store buildings on Fifth. The block square park in the center of the town provided a break in the regular pattern of streets, but there were few trees and the roads and streets were not paved. Dust in the summer and mud when it rained plagued everyone. Cement sidewalks were laid in front of the business lots and water pipes were put in by the Oxnard Water Company, but that was the end of



the improvements. The county roads, covered with straw to keep down the dust and fill the chuck holes, were alive with fleas.

Houses began appearing as soon as a town was projected. Ed Alplanalp built the first one at Sixth and D Streets. He had six men that worked so rapidly they slept in the place the first night, it was so nearly finished. Fred Joehneks ran a brick yard in what later became Chinatown. Brenneis opened a blacksmithing and repair shop that developed into a second industry for Oxnard, designing and manufacturing labor-saving tools and implements for ranch use. I. M. Poggi moved his drug store from Hueneme to the south side of Fifth at B. Ben Virden came from Saticoy and opened a drug store in a lean-to shop on Fifth next to the Kimball boarding house. He built a home on C Street in the 400 block and staked his cow and burro in front where they ate the milkweed. Achille Levy of Hueneme ran his bank and brokerage business in a wooden shack on Fifth. Later he built a brick building at Fifth and B on land purchased from Lehmann Brothers. Sam Weill worked for Lehmann and Waterman in Hueneme; and he, with one of the Lehmann brothers, started a branch store in a little wooden building with two tents in the rear. Lehmann and Waterman bought the first carload of sugar refined in Oxnard. Along came H. H. Witman, Hardware and General Merchandise; John Steinmiller with his harness shop; B. H. Korts, the butcher; and the Glenn Brothers livery stable. The railroad reached the factory on January 12, 1898, and passenger service started in April.

Houses started moving. From the Mehn lots in Hueneme came three cottages. Seven came from Saticoy, one at a time across the river bed, and settled down for fifty or more years on A Street between Third and Fourth. J. H. Bell bought the old Pleasant Valley School, moved it to Oxnard, added a second story, and opened a boarding house. Jack Hill had an old barn on a ranch near Montalvo. He brought it to the south side of the Plaza and made it into a three-story lodging house. The Thacker house was moved to E Street. The Alplanalp house, the first dwelling built in Oxnard, was moved from Sixth to Fifth and B streets and sold to A. Levy. Later it housed a jewelry store and a barber shop. Asa Kimball's boarding house first built in 1898 on the south side of Fifth, sidled over to Fourth and B in 1901 where as the Ramona Rooms it stayed until the 30's.

Churches did not wait to build either. The Presbyterians moved their building from Saticoy in 1900, getting stuck in the river on the way, but finally making it to Sixth and D streets. In the same year the Methodists brought their building from El Rio and, after remodeling, used it until 1915 when the Roman Catholics bought it and moved it to the east part of town. The Baptists first met in a railroad car. They built a new building for themselves on A Street but liked Fourth and C better so joined the moving procession.

The children of the new town first went to school in a building on Wooley Road near Rose Road which was enlarged by adding two rooms. This was entirely inadequate, and any room available in town



was used for school until an eight room building was completed in 1900 at Second and B. This was ready for use in September when R. B. Haydock became principal with five teachers.

The post office had been open for two years; the Oxnard *Courier* was over a year old; the Catholics, the Methodists, and the Baptists were holding regular services; there was a new school; soon the Masonic Temple was built; and Oxnard was beginning to feel like a town with its nearly 1000 population. For the business and professional people, it was a profitable place and for their families a pleasant one socially. Everyone looked forward to the opening of the factory season. A nice group came from the Louisiana sugar factories, and the young chemists married local girls. There was a great deal of social life, from formal afternoon calls to casual visiting. The Oxnards came every year at the time of the campaign. They always opened the factory warehouse with one enormous party for everyone. Henry T. Oxnard and his wife were French Catholics and endeared themselves to many by giving the land for the church and the convent grounds. St Joseph's Institute opened in 1901.

On Saturday nights or on rainy days, several hundred men from the factory and the beet fields would fill the sidewalks. Added to these might be crews of thirty to forty men each from the barley or bean threshing. Starting at the Plaza and all down the street to Saviers Road, the walks would be so crowded in places that women would step off one side and cross to the other and then back again to avoid having to push past the men. There was a saloon on Fifth between B and the alley, another across the alley and one on each of two corners of A street. There were several on Saviers Road. The saloon on the southwest corner of A and Fifth streets had a little stage at the back and usually left the door open so that anyone passing could see the dancing girls performing.

The fast women came out in the late afternoon wearing their flashiest clothes and hats loaded with plumes. They drove the smartest livery rigs with the fastest horses and dashed around the streets racing each other. Bicycles were a fad, and nice women found it dangerous to be out on their wheels while the other kind were taking an airing.

In a move for incorporation, Ike Steward prepared a petition to the supervisors requesting them to call an election. The sugary factory was included in the proposed city limits, and the sugar factory did not want to be. The supervisors refused the petition. A second petition with minor changes was prepared, and this time the supervisors agreed to call an election. The proposition passed, and a new city of the sixth class came into being with R. B. Haydock as President of the Board of Trustees. As a courtesy, until recent years one of the city trustees has always been a factory man.

As the residential section grew toward the west and respectable business occupied western Fifth Street, the tougher elements concentrated along Oxnard Boulevard and A Street from Sixth to Eighth streets. The Oxnard *Courier* for March 23, 1906, reported "One of the



most frightful and atrocious crimes that has ever shocked the people of this or any other town was committed at a little after three o'clock last Saturday morning, when Night Watchman Andrew Murray McNaughton was foully shot to death by a murderous and dastardly assassin in an alley back of one of the cribs in the red light district." The crime caused a crusade against vice by city and county officials, and they were busy all day Saturday raiding opium joints in the Chinese quarter. The paper says several handsome layouts were confiscated and taken to the City Hall. Marshall William Reno ordered every crib in the tenderloin district closed and gave the inmates twenty-four hours to leave town. The paper blasted conditions with an editorial "With so much unoccupied land all about us, there is absolutely no necessity for from 1000 to 1500 Japanese and Chinese cuddling themselves up in a half dozen measly, low, stinking and dirty huts with all kinds of pitfalls and dark alleys where murders can be committed in broad daylight without detection." Although there was no evidence to connect any Orientals with the crime, they received the first blame. Several Mexicans were finally tried for the murder.

While the east end of town was a rip-roaring western slum, the west side was listening to lecture courses, hearing W.C.T.U. speakers, having gay times at the skating rink in the opera house, putting on minstrel shows, or watching Joseph de Grasse as Shylock in the *Merchant of Venice*. On February 23rd the *Courier* reported the sermon at the Presbyterian Church at length on the front page; on March 23rd the paper was full of the murder of the night watchman.

The early settlers were Germans and Irish who bought ranches, and several Jewish families who ran the stores. The Irish families sat on the right of the center aisle of the Catholic Church, the Germans on the left. The Gospel before the sermon was read first in German and then in English. There was no objection until the first World War, when the Irish refused to stand for the German version. Since that time the reading has been in English.

Chinese came to Hueneme as laundrymen and gardeners. Japanese came as field laborers in the beets. They worked as contract laborers and were often badly treated. By 1906 they organized the Japanese Cooperative Contracting Company and advertised in the February 2nd *Courier* that "Japanese laborers who have been in Oxnard for years, wish to make contracts for harvesting of sugar beets direct with the growers." They were ready to work at a day's notice and could be found at the Laborer's Headquarters at Seventh and A. The Chinese were sometimes labor contractors. The sugar company brought in Mexicans as laborers, 1000 at one time under bond, and housed them in adobe huts on the factory grounds.

Oxnard could not have existed without a railroad. The Southern Pacific had a line from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara that ran through the San Fernando Valley, Castaic, Santa Paula, Montalvo, and Ventura. They were planning a more direct route from Los Angeles when they had finished joining the Coast Route between Santa Barbara and Santa



Marguerita. This would pass through Somis and go straight to Saticoy where it would join the old line. After the factory was projected, they swung the line south to Oxnard from Montalvo and then across to Los Angeles on as straight a line as possible.

When all California was booming around 1906, Oxnard was excited about a possible electric line up from Los Angeles. Nothing came of this, and they were disappointed when the railroad being constructed up the coast through the Rindge Estate was stopped. Oxnard did acquire a second railroad, however. John Burson, interested in the proposed Bakersfield and Ventura Railway, in 1907 built a rail line down A Street to Wooley Road, along the factory boundary and south past Hueneme Road, and then west to the wharf. This served several beet dumps, also. The sugar company bought the Ventura County Railway right-of-way and extended the lines to beet dumps until they had thirty miles of track. They ran a two cylinder Sheffield passenger car to Hueneme. It was a Sunday treat to pack up a picnic lunch and take the car to the beach. Once they took a troupe of thirty-one London actors who had played in Oxnard, to the beach.

Oxnard was one of the sights of California for President Theodore Roosevelt when he toured the state in 1903. On the day he visited the factory (May 16) he made a few remarks to a crowd at the gate. He mentioned his pleasure at being in Oxnard and seeing the tangible evidence of the extraordinary industry that had been started.

He commented, "I am not surprised at it because the last two days in California have taught me not to be surprised at anything. I have seen the results of your agriculture of all kinds, irrigation, and tilling of the soil and am not as surprised as I otherwise should be at the outstanding success you are making."

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- Oxnard *Press-Courier*, 50th Anniversary Edition, vol. 41, No. 18, June 28, 1949.
- The Prentice Clippings. A set of nine notebooks in which Enos D. Prentice of Oxnard filed newspaper items he found of interest.

### Letters from Berylwood Investment Company files:

- Thomas R. Bard to Jno. P. Green, November 26, 1897.
- Thomas R. Bard to Henry T. Oxnard, May 24, 1901.

### Books:

- Alexander, W. E. *Historical Atlas of Ventura County*. (1912)
- Johnston, Alva. *The Case of Erle Stanley Gardner*. Morrow, New York, 1947.

### Interviews:

- Mr. and Mrs. Richard Barrett Haydock, Miss Cynthia Donlon, Mr. Paul Lehmann, and Mrs. Palmyra Weill.



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Mrs. Robert G. Haley  
Walter Wm. Hoffman  
John P. Thille  
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### SUSTAINING

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Richard Bard  
Mrs. Walter H. Duval  
A. C. Hardison  
Mr. and Mrs. Milton M. Teague

## Half a Century of Service

*Ventura County Mutual Fire Insurance Co.* Organized on April 4, 1898 with E. P. Foster, president; Nathan Blanchard, vice-president and Charles Barnard, secretary. This old Ventura County business firm has faithfully followed the high standards set by its pioneer founders.

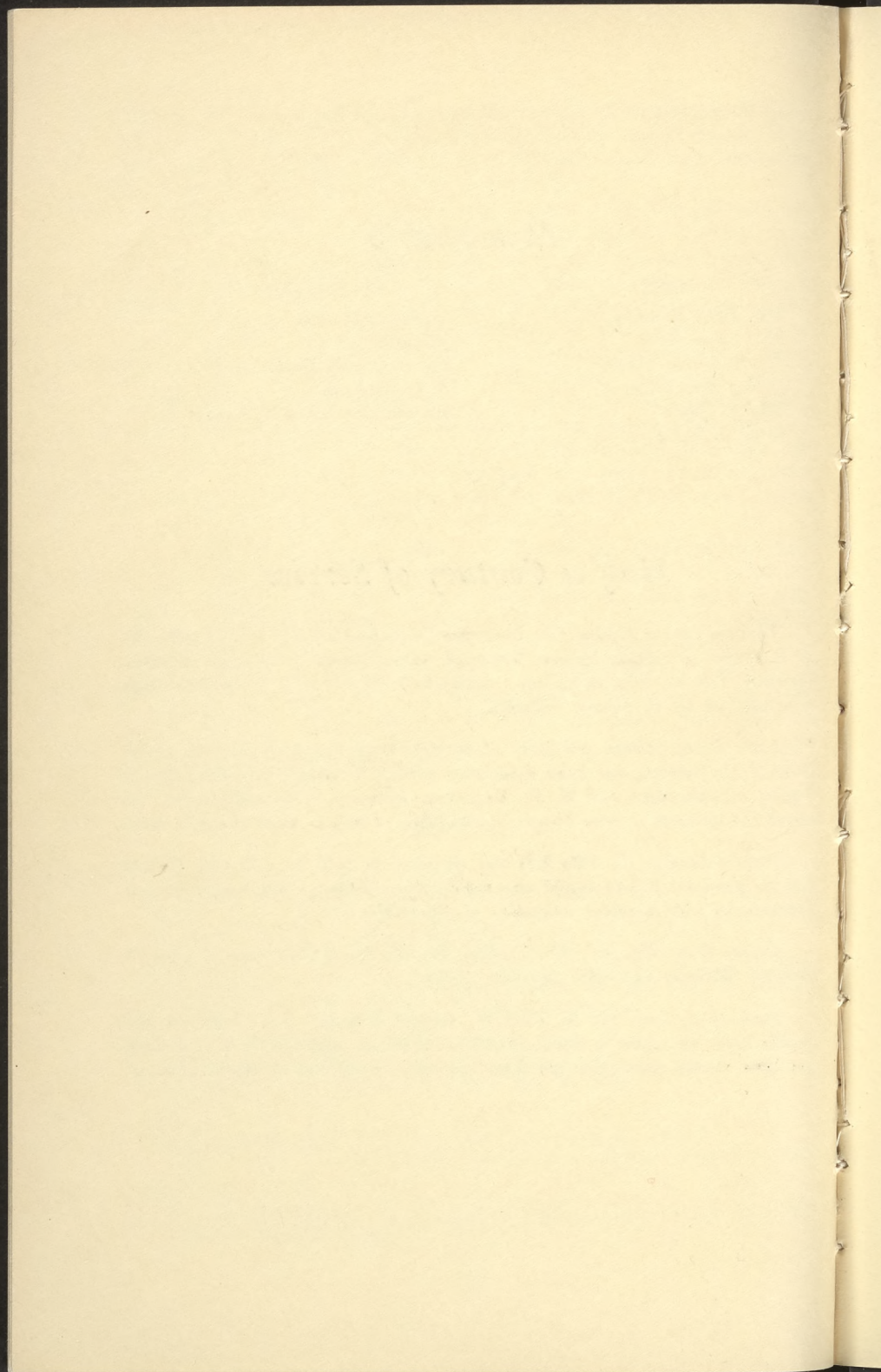
*Santa Paula Savings and Loan Association.* Organized in April 1890 as the Santa Paula Building and Loan Association with J. R. Haugh, president; Caspar Taylor, vice-president and H. H. Youngken, secretary. This organization has served the interests of home owners and builders, as well as those of the investor.

*Peoples Lumber Co.* This firm was organized in 1890 by a host of Ventura County pioneers. It has served the construction needs of its founders, their descendants, and countless thousands of newcomers.

*County Stationers, Inc.,* 532 E. Main, Ventura. Since 1898 Ventura County's complete stationer and office furniture dealer.

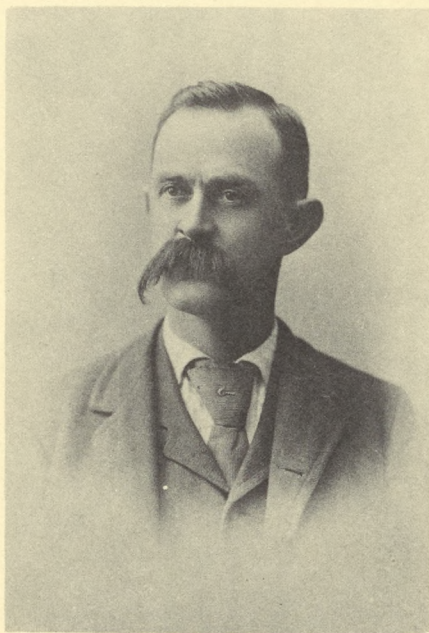
*Bank of A. Levy,* 143 W. Fifth St., Oxnard. Founded in 1900 by the late Achille Levy, who came to Hueneme in 1875. Since its inception Bank of A. Levy has been closely allied with the farm and ranch industries of Ventura County.







*The*  
VENTURA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
*QUARTERLY*



Hugh Warring

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VENTURA COUNTY KILOWATTS, 1870-1907

EARLY DAYS AT BUCKHORN RANCH



# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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The Ventura County Historical Society's headquarters is the Pioneer Museum, 77 North California Street, Ventura, California. There are three classes of membership—active, \$5 per year, sustaining, \$25 per year and life, \$100.

The QUARTERLY is published in February, May, August and November from the Society's headquarters at the Pioneer Museum. The editorial staff is composed of Chas F. Outland, Chairman, Mrs. D. A. Cameron, Mrs. C. R. Nieland, Grant Heil and Robert Pfeiler.

The Society assumes no responsibility for the statements or opinions of authors of various articles. All communications should be addressed to the Society at the Pioneer Museum. Memberships include subscription to the QUARTERLY. Additional copies are available at \$1.00 each.

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# The Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly

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VOL. IV, NO. 3

MAY, 1959

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## Pioneer Electric Energy

A number of years ago it was the privilege of the editor of the *Quarterly*, together with a group of men from Fillmore and Santa Paula, to visit the hydroelectric generating installations of the Southern California Edison Company at Big Creek, California. As guests of the company we spent three enjoyable days roaming the High Sierra wonderland and inspecting the marvels of modern hydroelectric generation and transmission. Not the least of our pleasant memories of the trip were the evening hours spent in discussing the problems of the early construction period, and the historical background of the Big Creek project. It was during one of these sessions that the writer began making inquiries of our host, L. S. "Pete" Peterman, about the history of the early electric utilities in Ventura County. Except for a few generalities there did not appear to be too much information available on the subject. At that time we urged Mr. Peterman to study the matter further and write a story for some future issue of the *Quarterly*. Pete agreed, but decided to postpone any serious research until after his retirement from active service with the Edison Company. The result of that research is a story called "Ventura County Kilowatts," the first installment of which the reader will find in this issue. The concluding installment, which will cover the period from 1907 to 1917, will appear in August. The editor doubts if any article printed in our publication since its inception has been as thoroughly and painstakingly researched as has "Ventura County Kilowatts." Mr. Peterman spent many hours patiently searching the Ventura County newspaper files, courthouse records, and the archives of the Edison Company. As a result, the fascinating story of the pioneer generation of electric energy in Ventura County will now be added to the record for future historians and other interested persons to study and enjoy.



# Ventura County Kilowatts, 1870-1907

By L. S. PETERMAN

Ventura County kilowatts, as we regard that entity in this narration, is a corporate descendant of the Santa Ana Water Company of Santa Barbara County, California, before Ventura County came into existence. The water company was incorporated January 10, 1870; and as there were some unusual features in its formation, we quote here verbatim, the entire Certificate of Incorporation:

## "SANTA ANA WATER COMPANY CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION

"Know all men by these presents, that we the undersigned have this day associated ourselves together for the purpose of incorporating, under the laws of the state of California, a corporation to be known by the corporate name of 'Santa Ana Water Company'—And we hereby certify that the objects for which this corporation is formed, are to dam the San Buenaventura River, in the county of Santa Barbara, state of California, at a point as near as may be, in a straight line up said river, from the mouth thereof from three to five miles, at a point where good fall can be obtained by building a dam, and conduct the water thereof by pipes and other artificial means for irrigating purposes, also for supplying the town of San Buenaventura with pure fresh water and also for the purposes of using the waters of said rivers for manufacturing and, mechanical purposes and propulsion of machinery. That the capital stock of this corporation shall be seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000.00) Gold Coin divided into three hundred (300) shares, of the par value of two hundred fifty dollars (\$250.00) Gold Coin each.

"That the time of its existence shall be fifty (50) years from and after the date of this certificate. That the number of its Trustees shall be three (3) and that the names of those who shall be Trustees and manage its affairs during the first three months and until their successors are elected, are

Walter S. Chaffee  
Thomas R. Bard  
William S. Patterson

"That its principal place of business shall be in San Buenaventura, Santa Barbara County.

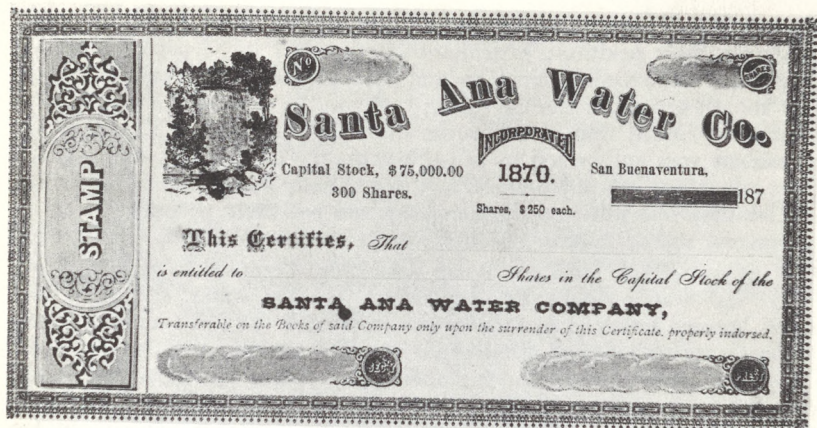
"In Witness whereof we have hereunto set our hands and seals this tenth day of January, A. D. 1870.

Signed: William S. Patterson, Seal  
Walter S. Chaffee, Seal  
Thomas R. Bard, Seal"

A certified copy of the "Act of Incorporation" was filed with the Secretary of State at Sacramento, California, on the twentieth day of January, 1870.

In a trustee's meeting held November 23, 1870, Messrs. W. S. Chaffee and George S. Gilbert were elected president and secretary, respectively.





Reproduction of the stock certificate  
employed by Santa Water Co.

One of the unusual features of the above instrument has to do with the rights, or the lack of rights, to the water taken from the river. It is well known that the Franciscan fathers brought water from the river to the San Buenaventura Mission by means of an aqueduct, portions of which are still standing on Canada Larga. Some conflict with the prescriptive rights of the Mission subsequently developed, for at a December 3, 1873 meeting of the trustees, President Chaffee was authorized to conclude an agreement with Tedeo Amat, Bishop of Monterey for:

"a deed for all the water of the San Buenaventura River and San Antonio Creek and all the rights, privileges, rights of way over and through the adjacent lands of Ex-Mission of San Buenaventura, Rancho Santa Ana and Canada Larga, attached to, belonging or appertaining to the real property of the Roman Catholic Church in the town of San Buenaventura and the Old Mission establishment of San Buenaventura, together with the old dams, ditches, flumes, aqueducts and works heretofore erected by the said Church or Mission establishment."

The consideration for the above was a free water delivery through a one inch pipe to the Mission establishment. The agreement was executed February 20, 1874.

For Santa Ana Water Company's supply, a diversion dam, a heap of boulders a couple of feet high, was thrown across the stream approximately 100 yards southeast and below of today's Casitas bridge. A ditch conducted the water back of the dam to a reservoir that occupied the site of the present city of Ventura Water works. Later a second ditch farther downstream went into service.

The company was hampered and plagued by unwise and malicious opposition; harassed by people who not only failed to appreciate their efforts to provide a water supply, but seemed to take pleasure in in-



juring them. They became involved in expensive litigation in order to maintain their position; exorbitant interest had to be paid for money borrowed in system extensions and improvements. Interest of  $1\frac{1}{2}\%$  per month seemed to be the going rate for the private lenders. It is a matter of record that at a trustees meeting held August 22, 1879, the president was authorized to sell the property of the company "to the best advantage" to pay debts. They were finally compelled to lose every dollar they had put into the company and see their property taken by strangers, strangers who did not live in or near Ventura.

In 1887 L. J. Rose and some associates attempted to acquire property and water rights by organizing another water company and soon became involved in serious law suits with the old company. Good counsels prevailed and finally all interests were consolidated by the purchase of Mr. Rose's water rights and property connected therewith. Mr. L. J. Rose Sr., Mr. C. F. Fargo and Mr. L. J. Rose Jr. became largely interested in the company. Prominent citizens bought out the interests of the non-residents and with Mr. Rose and his friends, obtained entire control of the company. In this reorganization Mr. G. W. Chrisman became interested and was elected president, L. J. Rose Jr., vice-president and E. P. Foster, secretary and superintendent. These men wielded a profound influence in the subsequent growth and development of not only their own company but the town of Ventura as well.

That the operations under the reorganization were successful is evidenced by the report on the company printed in the *Manual of American Water Works*, 1891. As of July 1, 1891 the company could boast of a one million gallon reservoir, seven and one-half miles of main distribution lines, seven meters, fourteen hydrants and 560 taps. The consumption of water was well over one million gallons per day.

In 1886 two events occurred in southern California that are significant to those interested in following or tracing the growth of electric service in this area. One was the starting up of a small hydro-electric generating plant in Santa Barbara to supply arc lights for the streets of that city. The other was the beginning of a small hydro-electric generating plant at Highgrove which supplied arc lights in the cities of Riverside and Colton.

It will be in order to explain here that arc lighting generators operated on the constant current system where the output amperes (amount of current) passed through all lamps in the circuit. This is similar to the arrangement employed with early Christmas tree lighting strings where, if the line was broken or a lamp failed, all lamps in the circuit went out. Arc lamps were usually supplied with a control device that would bypass the current around a non-operating or defective lamp. The output of these generators was either 4 or 6.6 amperes.

Arc lights for street lighting became quite popular. Since all lamps came on at one time and remained on, the set-up, generator and circuit required a minimum of regulation and control. But for store



and residential application, arcs were never too popular because of flicker and the possible high voltages involved.

In 1890 the Ventura Land and Power Company was organized with G. W. Chrisman, president. Actually, there was an interlocking roster of officers between Santa Ana Water Company and Ventura Land and Power Company.

In May, 1890 Mr. Chrisman announced that his company proposed furnishing Ventura with electricity if it could procure a franchise and a sufficient number of consumers to justify the enterprise. The proposed system included both arc and incandescent lamps. The arcs were equal to about 2,000 candle power, while the incandescent lamps ranged from 16 to 200 candle power.

Mr. Chrisman further announced that the businessmen and merchants were being contacted by Judge W. H. Wilde and him to sign for service for a one year term. Prices for service were: arc lights for 9:00 P.M. service—\$8.00 per month each, and for 12 o'clock midnight service—\$12.00; incandescent lights for 10:00 P.M. service—\$1.00 per month each and for midnight service—\$1.75 per month each. Costs of installing wires, lamps, etc. were to be borne by the company.

Early in June of 1890 Judge Wilde appeared before the town board of trustees meeting in behalf of Ventura Land and Power Company and asked for a franchise to erect and maintain a system of electric lights in the streets and alleys of Ventura. The franchise was granted, and the town agreed to contract for seven arc lights at a price of \$12.50 per month each for service to 12 o'clock midnight for a term of one year.

At this time Ventura had a number of gas burning street lights, a service which was furnished by the Ventura Gas Company; and at the June 20, 1890 meeting of the board of trustees, the Gas Company submitted a blistering letter, challenging the honesty of the board in its contract with Ventura Land and Power Company. They felt that inasmuch as they had been supplying street lighting, they were entitled to the business of furnishing electric street lighting which they offered to do at a cost \$2.00 below the quotation of Ventura Land and Power Company.

The trustees took no action on the protest, contending that negotiations with Ventura Land and Power Company had been public knowledge and if the gas company had an offer to submit, it should have been presented prior to execution of the contract.

Notwithstanding the turndown by the trustees, the gas company, which had now become Ventura Gas and Electric Company, in a surprise move, began setting poles on Main Street west from Chestnut Street at 3 A.M. on the morning of July 5, 1890, and by 10:00 A.M. were attaching wires to them.

Mr. Chrisman announced that his company would go ahead with their plans; would have their plant ready within the time agreed and fulfill their contract for lighting. They would place their poles and wires on the same side of the street, only their poles would be ten



feet higher "thus preventing any question of interfering with the rights acquired by the snap-shot action of the Gas Company."

To expedite matters the Ventura Land and Power Company decided to install their arc dynamo and water wheel next to the Rose Flour Mills, a subsidiary enterprise, which employed a water wheel for power, and so use the water ditch from the river to the mills at night when the latter were shut down. Location of this mill was along the west side of today's Ojai Freeway, approximately six-tenths of a mile south of the Shell Chemical plant.

Subsequently, another dam and ditch were constructed making a total of four diversions of the Ventura River water.

True to a threat of meaning business, the gas company installed a thirty light dynamo at their plant on what is now Garden Street and the site of the city police station. On the evening of August 4, 1890 Ventura's first electric lights were turned on by the Ventura Gas and Electric Light Company in five lamps; at the gas plant, Santa Clara Hotel, Chaffee's corner, Stock's corner, and Main at California. This was only a demonstration run to show the power and character of the lights, and after a couple of hours the plant was shut down and never operated again.

Delivery of the water wheel for the Ventura Land and Power Company dynamo was delayed in transit; but on August 22, 1890 it went into operation, a 60 light machine lighting some twenty odd lamps in different parts of town. The only private lamps on that evening were three in the Anacapa Hotel: in the lobby, the dining room and the billiard room. The hotel manager complained, however, that the lamps gave too much light. So came the first electric lights to Ventura.

As a matter of record, on July 25, 1890 the Ventura County Board of Supervisors granted Ventura Land and Power Company a franchise to erect and maintain poles, masts and other appliances along the public highways of Ventura County. During the spring of 1891 the company started construction of a fifteen ton ice manufacturing plant and a 1,000 light incandescent electric plant at a location west of the present Seaside Oil Company refinery on West McFarlane Street.

Successful incandescent electric lighting had its birth in 1882 with Thomas A. Edison's Pearl Street Station in New York City. This was a direct current, constant potential installation and supplied the congested area of the city. The Edison system spread to many eastern cities with closely built up business areas. The distribution area that could be commercially and successfully served was about one mile in all directions from the plant; but for the smaller, scattered communities of the west where greater distances were encountered, the Edison direct current system made little headway.

In the fall of 1886 as a result of much experimental work, the first alternating current generator was installed in a commercial generating plant in Buffalo, New York. It was a 750 light, 1,000 revolution per minute, 1,000 volt, single phase machine. Other installations were made in 1887, and soon several companies that had been building arc



light machines were building and installing alternating current generators.

Alternating current generators were installed in five different areas of southern California during 1890. These machines were all small (less than 100 kilowatt capacity) single phase, high frequency (that is 125 or 133 cycles) 1100 volts. A machine of this type was ordered for the new incandescent plant of Ventura Land and Power Company.

To provide the necessary water power to drive the ice manufacturing machine and the generator called for the enlargement of the water ditch from the river; the construction of over 5,000 feet of open flume, seven feet wide and two feet deep. The route followed by these facilities took the water along the southwest corner of the present Shell Oil Company District office, then across to the east side of Ventura Avenue to a regulating reservoir near the site of the Avenue School. From the reservoir a 36 inch steel pipe, 4,000 feet long, conducted the water to the plant which developed a head of 65 feet. At the plant two 24 inch pipes went to the two water wheels. The water wheels, revolving at 700 revolutions per minute, were belted to the electric generator and ice making ammonia compressor. These units were housed in a 20'x50' building, and the ice making tanks were in an adjoining structure 50'x81'.

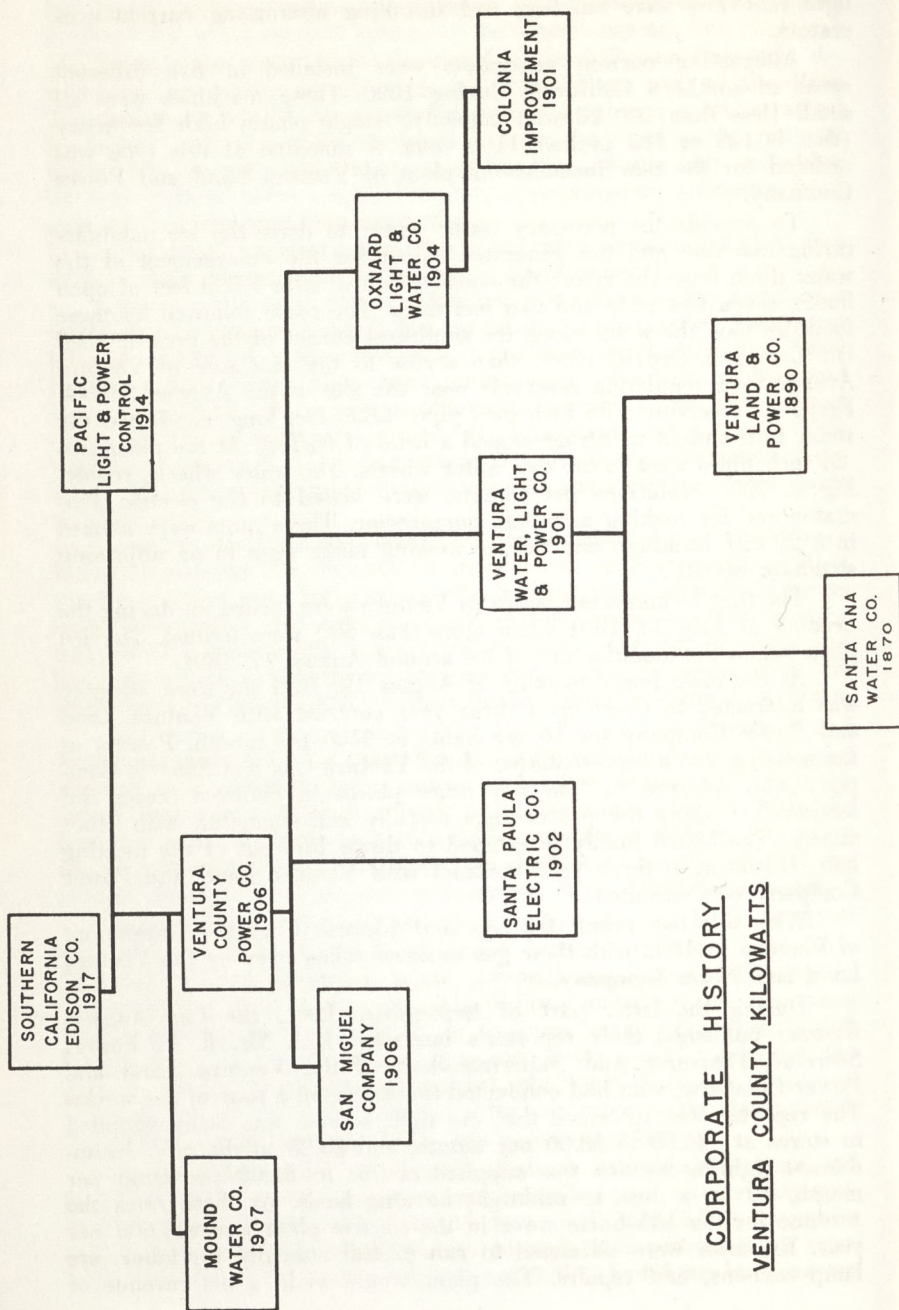
The first incandescent lamps in Ventura were turned on during the evening of July 30, 1891 when more than 500 were lighted. The ice plant began the manufacture of ice around August 17, 1891.

At the town board meeting of August 19, 1891 the town attorney was instructed to draw up a three year contract with Ventura Land and Power Company for 16 arc lights at \$100 per month. Present at the meeting was a representative of the Ventura Gas and Electric Company who referred to "the way other places in civilized places did business"—calling the proceedings rascally and shameful, with other abuses. The board finally threatened to throw him out of the meeting hall. However, a three year contract with Ventura Land and Power Company was executed.

With this last rebuff the Gas and Electric Company bowed out of Ventura in 1892 with their gas business taken over by the Ventura Land and Power Company.

During the latter part of September, 1891, the Los Angeles *Express* published their reporter's interview with Mr. E. P. Foster, Secretary-Treasurer and Superintendent of the Ventura Land and Power Company, who had conducted the writer on a tour of the works. The reporter was informed that arc light service was being supplied to stores at \$6.00 to \$8.00 per month, and \$6.25 to the city. Incandescent lighting service was supplied at 75c to \$1.00 per lamp per month, all on a dusk to midnight burning basis. At these rates the revenue for the 135 horsepower in the electric plant was \$13,500 per year. Expenses were estimated to run \$2,400 annually for labor, arc lamp carbons, and repairs. The plant would yield a net revenue of





CORPORATE HISTORY  
VENTURA COUNTY KILOWATTS



1870

\$82.22 per horsepower. The reporter submitted a glowing and enthusiastic story of his visit.

The ice plant and the incandescent light plant were completely destroyed by fire on January 20, 1898. The property was valued at forty to fifty thousand dollars but carried only twenty thousand dollars of insurance. The engineer reported that everything appeared normal when he shut down the plant at midnight. No explanation for the fire could be developed.

About June 1, 1898 the rebuilt plant went into service. Ventura had been without incandescent lights since January 20, a period of 131 days. Street lights were on, for the arc light dynamo was still in operation next to the Rose Flour Mills.

About May 1, 1901 the Santa Ana Water Company and the Ventura Land and Power Company were taken over by a Los Angeles corporation. The new organization was called the Ventura Water, Light and Power Company. The officers were T. W. Brotherton, president and general manager; J. H. Adams, vice-president; T. W. Phillips, secretary-treasurer; W. R. Staats and J. D. Torrance, directors; W. S. Post, resident manager. Involved in the transfer were the water rights to the Ventura River; the electric light and power plants; the reservoirs, pipe line, wires, and franchises in Ventura; the Rose Flour mills; four large orchards and a tract of 700 acres of hill land between Ventura and Nordhoff. It can be noted here that one of the orchards (in apricots) subsequently became the Edison oil lease developed by the Shell Oil Company. There are presently 57 oil and gas producing wells. Royalty payments for these operations are paid to Edison Securities company, a subsidiary of Southern California Edison Company.

At a Los Angeles meeting in February of 1902 management of Ventura Water, Light and Power Company was transferred to Ventura with E. P. Foster, president; J. H. Adams, vice-president; and George C. Power, secretary-treasurer. Other directors were: J. C. Collins and Charles Barnard of Ventura, J. M. Gardner of Los Angeles, and W. R. Staats of Pasadena.

Articles of incorporation for Santa Paula Electric Light Company were filed May 9, 1902. The five directors named were: C. C. Teague and C. H. McKeveatt of Santa Paula; J. A. Driffil of Oxnard; W. V. Lockwood and W. J. Wayte of San Francisco. Capital stock of the corporation was \$200,000 divided into 20,000 shares of the par value of \$10.00.

The plant was built along the north side of Railroad Avenue. between Mill and 9th streets and contained a 75 kilowatt Westinghouse generator driven by a Corliss steam engine. Some of the original powerhouse building and a stable and barn built later are still standing. The first incandescent electric lights in Santa Paula were turned on about July 1, 1902.



In early July of 1900, this opening sentence of a story appeared in one of the county's newspapers—"Oxnard will be no longer in darkness if present plans mean anything." The story went on to describe some tests with a 30 horsepower dynamo in a pump house of the Colonia Improvement Company. The test runs developed a strong bright light and hopes were raised that perhaps a company could be organized that would "put in a large dynamo and furnish the whole town with all the light it needs."

The above represented some wishful thinking and was not realized until 1905 when the Oxnard Light and Water Company came into existence. A plant, housed in a building 50' x 106' and located along the south side of East 5th Street and the Southern Pacific Railroad, went into service in June of 1905. The plant contained two units: a 125 kilowatt General Electric generator, belt driven by a 160 horsepower Corliss steam engine; and a 75 kilowatt Bullock generator, belt driven by a 110 horsepower Corliss steam engine.

The Oxnard plant was designed and built by a San Francisco engineering company, and in the employ of this company was a young engineer named Charles F. (Charlie) Zapf. A native of Germany, Zapf came to America at 16 years of age and in time became a free-lance construction engineer on various steam plants throughout California. He maintained his residence or headquarters in San Francisco. Upon the completion and starting up of the Oxnard plant, Charlie returned to his northern base and had been there but a few weeks when the 1906 earthquake hit. He lost everything in the fire that followed. A new start had to be made, and Zapf decided that Ventura County was the place. He became assistant to James Barker, who was in charge of construction work for the Ventura Water, Light and Power Company; and upon Barker's resignation, Zapf became operational manager for the company.

The successions described in this narrative involving "Ventura County Kilowatts" will, in the main, terminate in 1917. No so, however, the activities of Charlie Zapf, who at his retirement in 1932 was District Superintendent of Operation and Construction for Southern California Edison Company. At that time he became superintendent of the Ventura City water system and experienced a second retirement from that position in 1945. For more than fifty years Charlie was actively engaged with utility business and problems. During that time he became one of Ventura County's colorful and legendary characters. In February, 1958 Mr. and Mrs. Zapf moved to Piedmont, California and are presently living with two of their unmarried children.

Late in 1905 Ventura Water, Light and Power Company started a number of system improvements. The street lighting system was rebuilt; new modern lamps replaced the originals, and the old arc dynamo and water wheel were replaced by a transformer type of constant current regulator. The major improvement, however, was a new generating unit called the Race Track plant located at what is now Seaside Park. The original building is next to the grandstand of the athletic and



baseball field. The plant, placed in service in early 1906, contained a 150 kilowatt, three phase generator direct connected to a steam engine. No attempt was made to operate the new generator in parallel with the older plant along the river north of town, and each plant served a designated area. The older plant served all of the street lighting.

On October 3, 1906 Ventura Water, Light and Power Company, Oxnard Light and Water Company, and Santa Paula Electric Company were involved in a consolidation that became Ventura County Power Company. Officers of the new company were: J. A. Driffil, president and general manager; J. S. Torrance, 1st vice-president; W. B. Staats, 2nd vice-president; James R. Martin, secretary; T. E. Walker, assistant secretary; James A. Donlon, treasurer; C. H. McKeveit, J. H. Adams, and T. W. Phillips, directors. It was announced that the capital stock of the organization was \$2,500,000 divided into 25,000 shares of \$100 each.

The Title Insurance and Trust Company of Los Angeles acted as agent for Ventura County Power Company in the financial exchange which involved \$22,000 for Santa Paula Electric Company; \$113,000 for Oxnard Light and Water Company; and \$268,000 for Ventura Water, Light and Power Company.

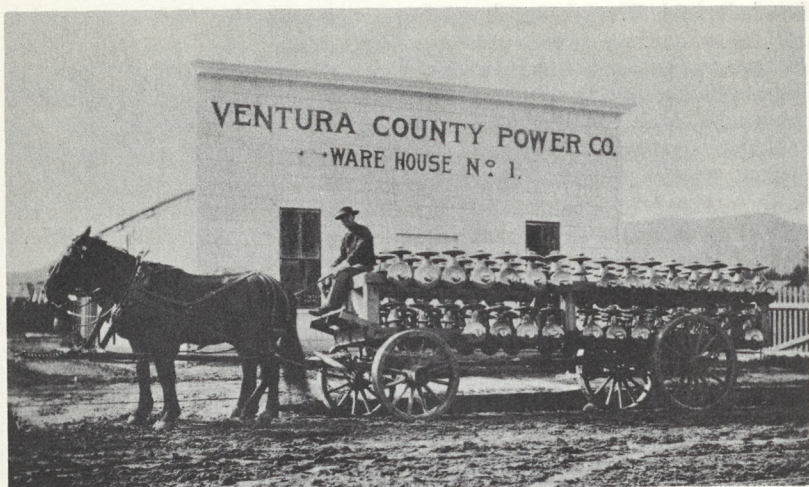
The service area was divided into three districts: Oxnard and all that section south of the Santa Clara River as one; Ventura, Saticoy, Nordhoff and the western part of the county as a second; and Santa Paula and the east end of the county was the third. Oxnard was the residence of President Driffil, so the general offices were established in that city. The old office building presently occupies the southwest corner of 4th and B streets.

In 1907 the Edison Electric Company of Los Angeles (predecessor of Southern California Edison Company) placed in service Kern River No. 1 hydroelectric plant with four 5,000 kilowatt generating units and transmitted the energy at 75,000 volts over a 118 mile transmission line to Los Angeles. This line was the first to use steel towers in southern California. The towers had been designed and fabricated by a manufacturer of windmills. Along this line were three switching stations: one at Tejon, another at Castaic, and a third at San Fernando.

At this time generating plants in Ventura County usually operated from dusk to midnight. Anyone who was having a party or celebration and did not want to turn guests away before midnight had to go to the light manager's office and make a deal to get light an hour or two longer.

To have electricity available around the clock and to provide service to the east end of the county in the Fillmore and Piru areas, a 33,000 volt, three phase transmission line was built between Saticoy and Castaic, which tapped the Kern River supply at the latter location. Branch lines were extended from Saticoy to Oxnard and Ventura. The lines were built, owned and operated, and maintained by Ventura County Power Company. The line was designed for two circuits, but the second circuit was never added. Energy transmitted over this line





A load of insulators for the transmission line between Saticoy and Castaic.

was metered at Castaic. The superintendent of construction for the new line and the substations was an engineer on leave from Edison Electric Company of Los Angeles named Clyde E. Houston. Upon completion of the line Houston returned to Edison Electric in 1908. At the time of his death in January of 1943, he was Vice-President and General Manager of Southern California Edison Company.

With the Castaic transmission line in service, electricity came to Fillmore and Piru. The steam generating plant in Santa Paula was abandoned and the equipment subsequently installed in Coalinga. The Race Track plant was also abandoned and the equipment sold to an Escondido utility. The electric generator (combination steam and hydro drive) at the old plant along the river north of Ventura was retained as emergency stand-by for the gas manufacturing facilities at that location.

The Oxnard plant continued to operate for the dual purpose of voltage regulation and an emergency supply in the event of trouble, or an outage occurred, on the transmission lines between Oxnard and Castaic or between Castaic and the Kern River generation.

On February 20, 1907 Ventura County Power Company donated 37.4 acres of land at Casitas to Ventura County for park and resort purposes. The transfer was executed for the company by J. A. Driffil, president and H. R. Staples, assistant secretary. This land was contiguous to an earlier donation by Mr. E. P. Foster of the company, a memorial to his son Eugene, deceased. These land donations to the county are today's Foster Park.

In March of 1907 the Ventura County Power Company acquired by purchase the pumping plant and distributing system of the Mound Water Company, a mutual concern serving domestic and irrigation



water to approximately 800 acres east of Ventura. The purchase price for the facilities was \$34,066. The motive power of the pumping plant was steam which was subsequently replaced by electric drive.

In 1907 construction started on a submerged dam across the Ventura River and down to bedrock at Casitas Narrows to conserve the supposed flow of underground water in the gravel beds of the river above the narrows. The original estimate for this dam was less than \$17,000, but it turned out to be a costly project. During 1907 and 1908 the company spent over \$86,000 and then quit. In 1910 work was resumed under the supervision of F. W. Hunter, vice-president, and completed in 1911 at a total cost in excess of \$100,000.

This story has to do primarily with Ventura County's generation of kilowatts and the distribution of electric service. However, since Ventura County Power Company and the predecessor company, Ventura Water, Light and Power Company, were involved in the gas business, it will be in order to briefly record here some of the dates in connection with the distribution of that commodity in Ventura County.

In January of 1904 Ventura Water, Light and Power Company announced that a gas manufacturing plant would be built adjacent to the incandescent electric plant along the river. The gas, manufactured from oil, would be augmented and mixed with some natural gas obtained from 7 shallow wells in the immediate area.

A month later laying of a pipeline into Ventura got under way and at the same time the company announced that a new well, drilled to 99 feet, developed an estimated daily flow of 10,000 cubic feet, which when added to the production of the seven wells would make available 45,000 cubic feet, double the estimated daily Ventura demand.

During the first week of May gas stoves were installed in Ventura. The gas rate at this time was set at \$1.50 per thousand cubic feet. In August, 1904 the company announced that a portion of the Taylor Ranch west of the river had been leased for gas development, and plans were being formulated to supply all of Ventura County with gas.

In November of 1904 the Oxnard Board of Town Trustees granted the company a franchise to use the streets and alleys for the laying of gas pipe lines. October, 1906 saw the completion of a pipeline from Oxnard to Hueneme.

On April 1, 1907 the City of Santa Paula granted a pipeline laying franchise to the company, and gas was delivered during the summer. During 1907 the company erected a gasometer or storage container on their property in Santa Paula and a larger one of 50,000 cubic feet capacity next to the Oxnard steam generating plant on East 5th Street.

All of the gas for these communities was supplied by the plant in Ventura where the manufactured product was mixed or blended with the natural supply from the near-by wells.



# The Early Days at Buckhorn Ranch

*As told to V. M. Freeman in 1938*

By HUGH WARRING

I first entered the Santa Clara Valley at San Buenaventura in September, 1869. I was nothing but a mere kid—12 years old. On September 7th my parents had started by wagon train from San Jose, Santa Clara County, for southern California, arriving at the Ventura River on the 29th of the month and camping there overnight. The next day as we came through the town we found two lines of fences across the street forming two sides of a corral. The buildings on the street formed the other two sides<sup>1</sup>. We were informed that a bull and bear fight had taken place there shortly before we arrived. We had to take down a portion of these fences in order to get through the town.

The Santa Clara Valley as far as Santa Paula Creek was a field of dry mustard from the foothills on the north side of the road to as far as the eye could see in the direction of Hueneme. One could just see over the top of this sea of yellow mustard while riding on the seat of the old four horse farm wagon. Riding in a buggy or a spring-wagon you could see only the road, which wound along up the valley in much the same general direction as the present highway.

To my knowledge and recollection there were only two families living between Ventura and the John Lawton place about two miles from Piru. A family by the name of Joy was living at what was later known as Ellsworth Barranca; and the Johnson family, who were living about one mile west of Santa Paula Creek, very near to the present home of A. C. Hardison. Those were the only two buildings that I remember where there was anyone living.<sup>2</sup> There was an adobe building down where the Rancho Sespe headquarters are today. It was in a pretty good state of preservation and was occupied by one of More's sheepherders<sup>3</sup>.

We originally came to the Santa Clara Valley on a visit. My uncle, Ari Hopper, had preceded us by a year and was living in Hopper Canyon. His nephew persuaded my father to go to Ventura and purchase a load of lumber to put up a little shack on his place, the Buckhorn Ranch, and stay there until the following spring before returning to our home in San Jose. Well, when spring came around, we did not want to go back; we liked the looks of the country. He was down to the house one day, and my father asked him what he would take for his possessory rights in the place. (He had just claimed it; it was not subject to entry.) He told my father to give him that Colt revolver and he could have it. My father just took it off and gave it to him<sup>4</sup>.

My father purchased the Lawton place from a man by the name of Dunton. I do not know what he gave for it, but it did not amount to anything. He bought it for a Mr. Conaway who was coming down to this country, and he traded him the property for a horse. He also bought the Goodenough place (Leavens & Goodenough) from a man



by the name of Lebec<sup>5</sup>. He bought that for \$50 or \$100 and gave it to his son.

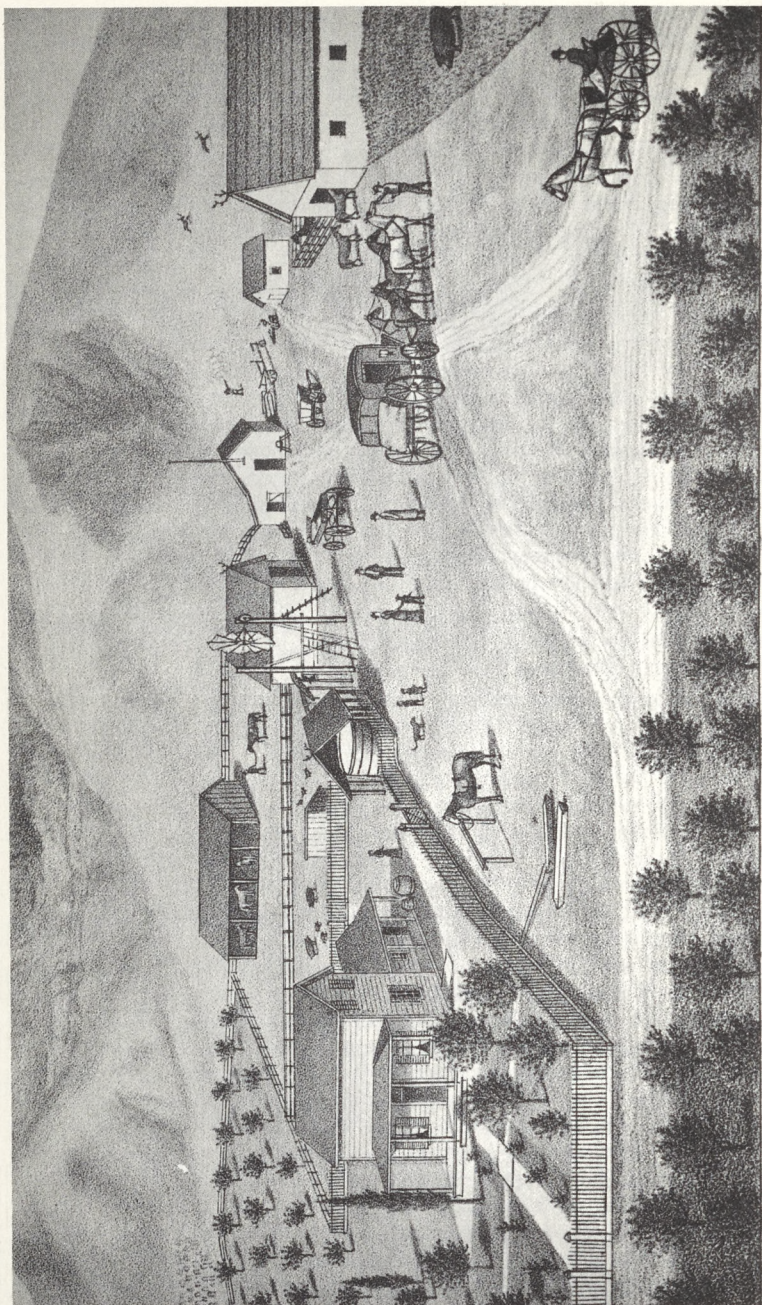
The first school this side of the present Briggs District, was started in the summer of 1870 and was held under the shade of a native walnut tree here on the John Lawton place. A man by the name of Ferris, a relative of Hopper's who had come out from Kentucky on a visit, was the first teacher. He taught the school for a year. It was later known as the Cienega School District, and was comprised of the whole country from down by Sespe to the east county line. Our second teacher was a man by the name of Caldwell. He was only eighteen years old, but he taught the school all right. He is dead now.

The first crops were grain and hay. The coast stage line used to run through the Simi Valley; but when the railroad was built from San Francisco, the stages connected with Saugus and Newhall instead of going the other way. The stage company established a station down here at the ranch. For quite a few years we were fortunate in getting the opportunity to furnish them with hay. Later on they changed the station again and put one at Pole Creek and one up at the county line above here. Then we furnished the hay for both stations—about 100 tons a year. This represented quite a sum of money for those days—\$8.00 per ton being the price. We could live and get along.

We just drifted from one thing to another. We were in the stock business for a few years and later on in the bee business. We bought the apiaries in 1883 and sold out in 1886.

This little dew we had here recently was nothing compared with 1884. I was down on the Sespe duck hunting on the first day of January, 1884, right along where the present bridge is, and you could walk along the bed of the creek on the rocks and not get your feet wet. The rocks were covered with moss on the first day of January. I just wondered that day if we would ever have any water in the stream. Well, about the 25th of January, I think it was, we had the highest water that we had seen since we had been here<sup>6</sup>. On the 26th of February it just discounted that, I don't know how many times. We had had a very heavy rain, the ground was thoroughly wet, and it began snowing one afternoon about 2 o'clock; and it quit sometime in the night. We got up the next morning and it was cloudy all over and looked like it would commence raining any minute, but over in the east it was clear and the sun came up bright. You could see nothing but snow; it was six inches deep right in the valley. By 11 o'clock it was raining good and hard, and about 12 or 1 o'clock we sure had high water. The canyon held it until it got into the valley, then it went both ways—everywhere. There was nothing it could damage. There was nothing growing—not a tree in the country; and there were no railroads or bridges. The water just milled around slowly. It was waist deep where the railroad is now. That was river water—not Hopper Canyon. It took out acre after acre of that fine bench land on the other side of the river. You could hear it go into the





BUCKHORN RANCH, VENTURA COUNTY, B F WARRING PROP.



river from where we lived, half an acre at a time. For thirteen days in March there was not a living soul that crossed the river anywhere from Saugus to the ocean. Bill Whittaker, a neighbor of mine, was the first to get across. He lived on the opposite side from Buckhorn, and nearly everything he had was washed away. His wife died during the high water, and he undertook to cross and made it. It is the biggest wonder in the world that he was not drowned. One man down at Saticoy, a blacksmith living in El Rio by the name of Beers, got on a horse and rode out to look at the flood. He got too close to the bank; and the first thing they knew the bank went down, and he and the horse were never seen again<sup>7</sup>.

The first Fourth of July celebration held in the county east of Santa Paula, as I remember, was in 1876, the Centennial year. The celebration was held in a grove on the F. A. Sprague place on the Sespe River, close to its intersection with the Santa Clara River. Col. J. D. Hines was the orator of the day, with F. A. Sprague rendering the Declaration of Independence. Ari Hopper, a noted bear hunter, made a speech as well. W. B. Whittaker, now of Piru, and the writer, conducted a refreshment stand on the occasion, dispensing ice cream, lemonade, candies, cigars, etc. People came from all parts of the county to help celebrate this great event, possibly twelve or fifteen hundred people were present. It was thought to be the biggest crowd ever assembled in Ventura County up to that time.

The first postmaster of Cienega, on the Dr. Adams' place next to the river and joining Rancho Sespe's property, was C. H. Decker. Then it was moved around to different places and finally abandoned entirely, like Buckhorn where they used to have a postoffice. The Buckhorn postoffice was abandoned when Piru came into existence. We got our mail at Santa Barbara when we first came here, but the reason for that was when we left San Jose we told our people we were going to Santa Barbara County. We did not know anything about San Buenaventura, so our mail was all sent to Santa Barbara; and we had to go up there and get it until we could notify our people back home to send it to Ventura.

It was a five day trip to Santa Barbara—two days to go up, a day to lay over to let the team rest and to do the shopping, and two days to come back. It always took two days to go to Ventura and back—66 miles, although my father used to drive it in one day and was the only man I know that did. He had a light buggy and a fine driving horse which could go 7 miles an hour. He would start out in the morning and go to Ventura, leave his horse at the livery stable to be fed, and come back on the same day. Everyone else had to figure on a two day trip.

I remember in 1884 we went to Ventura and got a load of lumber for beehives, and we came out to the first barranca where they have the reservoir at Limonera Del Mar. In those days there were no bridges. You drove almost straight down, and up again on the other side to get out. That night it rained a little bit and washed out the gully. The



next morning we could not get across, so we took off practically our whole load of lumber and piled it up on the side of the road. We kicked the banks down and finally crossed over and came home. We waited a few days and went down to Ventura again and got some more lumber and groceries and came back up to the gully and piled on the lumber we had left. We came as far as the Sespe, but the water was so high we could not cross. We crossed over to the Bardsdale side of the Santa Clara, went upstream about a mile and attempted to cross back again above the Sespe. It was nearly night and the team was tired. We got stuck in the quicksand, and there was no way to get out. We unhooked the team and rode a couple of the horses home. That night it rained again. Next morning we went back with the spring wagon and drove across the stream just above the wagon, and I jumped up onto the load as we went by. We had two or three orange trees that we were going to plant, the lumber, and a mattress on the wagon. When he came back, I handed him the trees and the mattress and jumped back onto the spring wagon. We had barely reached the bank when the old wagon raised up and started downstream, and the whole works went back to the ocean.

The good hunting was what brought my father here; he was a great hunter. There was any amount of game in the country—deer, bear, and an abundance of trout. The day we arrived the party living at my uncle's house killed three deer where Hager's orange orchard is now. The road between Buckhorn and Santa Paula would be padded with bear tracks every morning. There were different kinds of bear—mostly cinnamon, but quite a few grizzlies and blacks. The mountains were just full of game. You could go over to the Sespe at the head of the Avenue, and by going a couple of hundred yards could catch all the trout you could carry. All the streams were the same. The Santa Clara River from Cienega downstream was fine fishing. Up this way from Cienega I never heard of anybody catching a trout. There was too much sand; the trout will not stay there.

The year of 1877 was the first year of drouth we had after we came here. The grain we sowed in the spring of 1877 did not come up until 1878. In 1877 you could go up the Piru Creek, and you could almost walk on the carcasses of cattle right in the bed of the river. A lot of people undertook to get sheep out of this country and into Texas, but they never got there with them. The del Valle people lost a lot of their cattle that year. The animals would come down to water and drink their fill and die right there.

That was before we had a railroad in here. Prior to that time they had to drive their hogs up to Newhall and ship them. It would take several days to drive them from Saticoy to Newhall. Also, they would haul apricots from the lower end of the valley to Newhall after the railroad was built to dry them in the warmer climate.

The first citrus planting around Piru was on the Camulos Ranch: and as near as I can figure that out, it was along about 1857. Aside from the Camulos Ranch the first plantings were on the Cook place.



Buckhorn's first planting of citrus was about 1891 or 1892. They were bearing oranges in 1896. The first deciduous fruit trees were planted about the time the railroad came in 1887. The whole Buckhorn Ranch was planted in 1887 to apricots and prunes. Well, the prunes did not bear, so we took them out and planted the whole thing to apricots. Peaches never amounted to anything here. We had an orchard of almonds at one time, and could not get enough off the whole five acres to eat.

It was just "cut and try" but we were fortunate when we first came here in that we hooked up with the stage company on delivering feed for their stock; and we held it as long as they ran the business. It kind of gave us the edge over our neighbors as they had no market for their hay. I claim that was the reason we were able to hold on to our property. We are the only ones in the country that have the same property we originally had. The rest lost out. All those people who came in and bought land on time when it was worth only \$11 or \$12 per acre, lost out unless they had the money to put down and pay for it in cash.

San Francisco was the market for hogs. Nothing could be sold in Los Angeles; you could not sell a *quail* there, but for six years I hunted quail for the San Francisco market. That was when the railroad was first finished.

T. W. More and my father were fighting over this property until More was murdered. The decision of the court was handed down during the trial of his murderers. The grant was fraudulent, but whether More committed the fraud or not we do not know. He claimed six leagues, and he only had two in the Rancho Sespe. It was in three sections: Sespe, this side of Sespe up to Doc Adams' place, and the Bardsdale side. It was in three different tracts of land—one grant, but he claimed from mountain top to mountain top, and from Santa Paula to Piru. They fought over it for several years before it was finally settled.

We were never bothered much with bandits. We were living too close to them, and they did not molest us much. We could see a lot, but still "we did not see it." In other words, we kept our mouths shut. One day a party came riding through our place just at daylight. A fellow came up leading a horse all covered with lather, and when I went into breakfast I told father about it. I knew the man who had the horse. My father told me to just keep my face shut—if anybody came along inquiring about man or horse, I had not seen anything. They did not come to me anyway because I was quite a kid. I was the only one who saw it—stolen horse, you know.

Another time a man rode into our place just at sundown on a big Arabian horse. He was a halfbreed and wanted to know if he could get some supper. My mother told him he could and fed him. He got on his horse and rode on. It was not more than half an hour later that the officers came from Ventura. He had stolen the horse the day before and had held up all day down in Cienega out in the



brush. With night coming on, he started out again. About nine o'clock that night they came back with the horse, but we never saw the man again nor heard of him.

We had a brand new saddle hanging out in the shed. The road ran right by it, and somebody took the new saddle and left an older one in its place. The stage had been robbed one night up this side of the Santa Clara River; and we presumed it was the same fellows, two men on horseback. That was all we had taken that we knew of. Below here they would steal horses and cattle and everything.

There was only one family of Indians, the old Fostero family, and none of them are left now. They called him "Fostero" although he did not have a name, and was a saddle-tree maker by trade. I understand the meaning of "Fostero" is saddle-tree. They all went by that name, and now all are dead or left the country.

There were no dug wells in this area. We put in the first drilled well on the Buckhorn Ranch that was put in this end of the county. That was along about 1908 or 1909. We had anticipated getting water through the Piru water ditch. They had offered to let us have water, but they backed out. Our orchard was planted in the early part of 1910, and we finished the well just before that. We have a pit in this well down here that is five by eight feet and 126 feet deep. They just kept digging it down as the water kept lowering on them, and they finally put in concrete curb and filled in under it until they got down to 126 feet. That was about 1916. At first we had one of those old centrifugal pumps on a frame. Well, the water kept going down on them, so they finally went to work and drilled a hole in the bottom and put in a turbine.

## NOTES

1. The Mission Garden wall on the south side and the residences of Sanchez, Camarillo, et al, on the north side of Main Street. This "bull ring" was supposed to have extended from Ventura Avenue to the present Colombo Street — approximately.

2. The residence of M. D. L. Todd should also be included here.

3. The adobe referred to was probably built by Carrillo as a ranch house, but apparently not used as such by T. W. More.

4. Mr. Warring's version given here of his father's famous "revolver purchase" is considerably at variance with one he gave to a reporter of the *California Citrograph* some three years earlier. The earlier story is the correct one: "Living near them was a Mr. Hitchcock who had attempted to file homestead claim on 160 acres which now comprise the Buckhorn Ranch. There was a question whether his claim would have any legal value as it had been filed before the government opened the section to homestead entry. However, there was just a bit of a question there, so the senior Warring asked the preemptor what he would take for whatever right he might have. Glancing down at Warring's belt, Mr. Hitchcock replied, 'I'll trade you for that revolver you have there.' It was a trade. When the proper time came Mr. Warring filed on the 160 acres and it was set off to him under the government homesteading law."

5. There is no information available on any Lebec in this area.

6. Incorrect. The heavy rains started on the 26th of January.

7. Mr. Warring has his floods mixed here. Beers, according to the *Ventura Signal*, was drowned in December, 1879.



## Membership

### LIFE

Mrs. Edith Hoffman  
Mrs. Grace Smith  
Mrs. Robert G. Haley  
Walter Wm. Hoffman  
John P. Thille  
Grace S. Thille

### SUSTAINING

Adolfo Camarillo  
Richard Bard  
Mrs. Walter H. Duval  
A. C. Hardison  
Mr. and Mrs. Milton M. Teague

## Half a Century of Service

*Ventura County Mutual Fire Insurance Co.* Organized on April 4, 1898 with E. P. Foster, president; Nathan Blanchard, vice-president and Charles Barnard, secretary. This old Ventura County business firm has faithfully followed the high standards set by its pioneer founders.

*Santa Paula Savings and Loan Association.* Organized in April 1890 as the Santa Paula Building and Loan Association with J. R. Haugh, president; Caspar Taylor, vice-president and H. H. Youngken, secretary. This organization has served the interests of home owners and builders, as well as those of the investor.

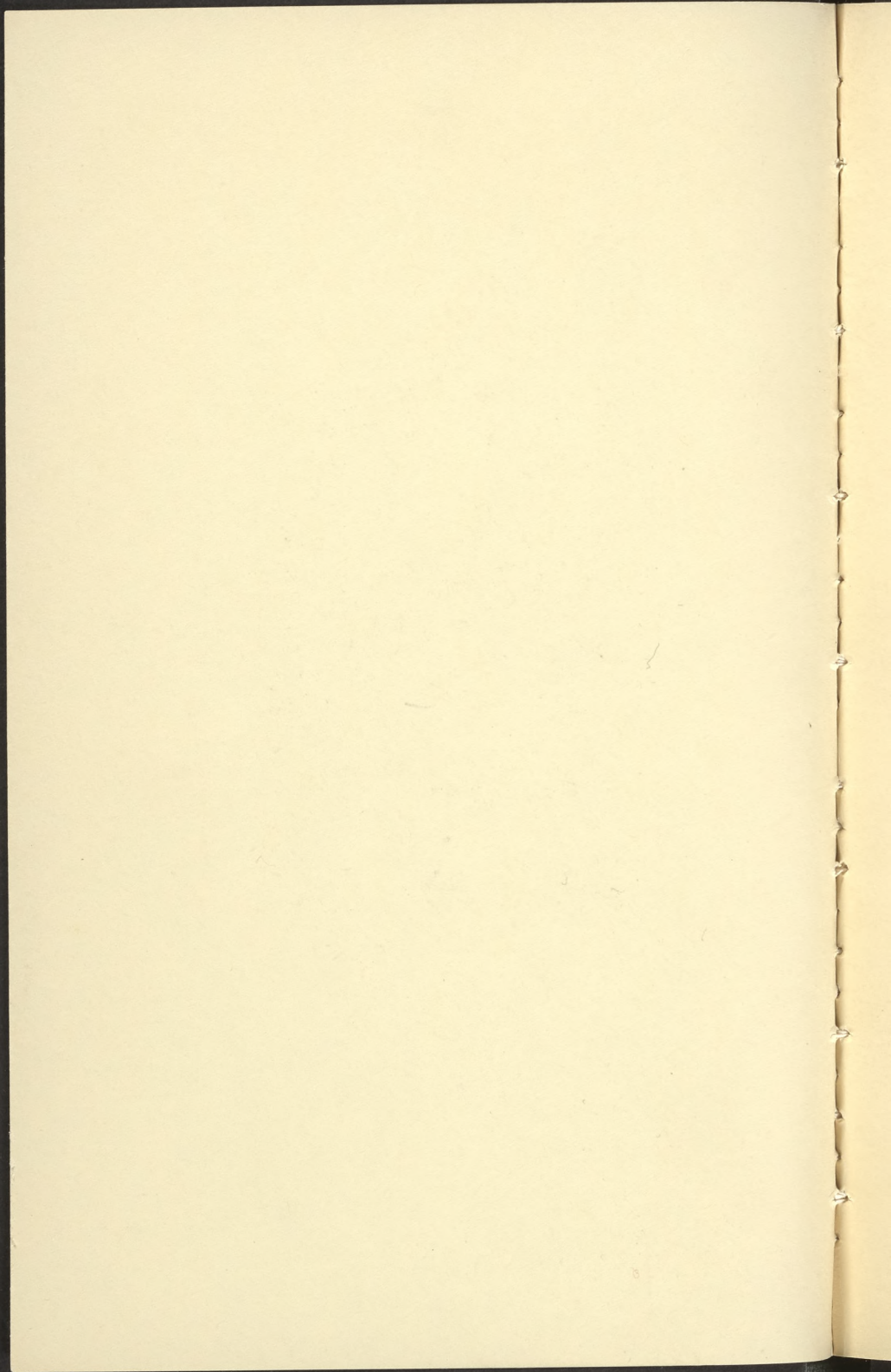
*Peoples Lumber Co.* This firm was organized in 1890 by a host of Ventura County pioneers. It has served the construction needs of its founders, their descendants, and countless thousands of newcomers.

*County Stationers, Inc.,* 532 E. Main, Ventura. Since 1898 Ventura County's complete stationer and office furniture dealer.

*Bank of A. Levy,* 143 W. Fifth St., Oxnard. Founded in 1900 by the late Achille Levy, who came to Hueneme in 1875. Since its inception Bank of A. Levy has been closely allied with the farm and ranch industries of Ventura County.

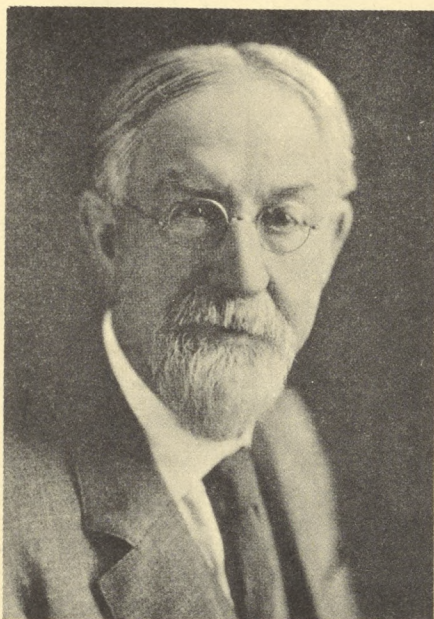
*Title Insurance and Trust Company*







*The*  
VENTURA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
*QUARTERLY*



Gilpin W. Chrisman

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# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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The Ventura County Historical Society's headquarters is the Pioneer Museum, 77 North California Street, Ventura, California. There are three classes of membership—active, \$5 per year, sustaining, \$25 per year and life, \$100.

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# The Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly

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## Junior Historians

We never cease to be surprised at the manner in which human beings react at times. For instance, our efforts to obtain printable historical stories from the oldtimers of the county have more often than not met with failure. Those having the time and knowledge to assist the staff of our *Quarterly* usually respond by suggesting they cannot write, or, "Let someone younger do it." We decided to do just that, and contacted the upper grade students at Briggs, suggesting that a few of them take on the assignment of writing the history of their school, the second oldest in the county. We hoped three or four of the best students would cooperate, and were totally unprepared when no less than thirty-two enthusiastic seventh and eighth graders volunteered for the task.

If the staff of the *Quarterly* could transfuse even a small percentage of the enthusiasm displayed by these junior historians to the oldsters of the county, its future work would be much simpler. The reader will understand, of course, that taking the ideas of so many "authors" and putting them into some form of continuity, coherency and readability presented something of a problem. Actually, of the original thirty-two volunteers twenty-five turned in usable material in some form or another. Even this number makes for an awkward byline, so for the benefit of those desirous of this information we list the names of our young contributors here. They are: Janice Rector, Suzanne Teague, Sandy Hicks, Sharon Rose, Jackie Bush, Gisela Woggon, Lucille Caven-der, Dick Outland, Bill Evans, Joyce Yarbrough, Gayla Mathews, Cheryl Axell, Patricia Wilde, Sally Longshore, Ester Soriano, Richard Boswell, Tom Habbick, Charlene Parks, Lynn Foster, Steve Robbins, Phil White, Sandra Axell, Donna Hale, Benny Carney, and Andrea Ayers.

We trust that other schools in the county with long and interesting backgrounds will follow the example of Briggs and send us their stories.



# Ventura County Kilowatts, Post 1907

By L. S. PETERMAN

The first installment of "Ventura County Kilowatts" described a steady growth for the organization instrumental in providing the county with water, electricity and gas. To say that this growth was accomplished with no rough going at times would not be factual telling, and we have already referred to the difficulties that beset Santa Ana Water Company in the early days of their operations. In connection with the rough going just mentioned, it should be borne in mind that Ventura's water came from the river; and after heavy rains muddy water replaced the small storage of clean and clear water in the ditches and pipe lines. If delivery of uninviting storm water was prolonged, the company could expect to hear from the dissatisfied water users who were usually reinforced by a small group of noisy collectivists bent on having the town take over all operations of the company. Good counsels usually prevailed in these onslaughts, but in two of these the company would have been taken over by the town but for the fortunate legalities that entered the battles. Briefly, here are some of the details in connection with those two instances:

After two years of haggling Ventura Land and Power Company in March, 1895 proposed to sell to the town the water system for \$106,500 and the electric lighting system for \$23,500, or \$130,000 for both. An election was held July 9, 1895, and the purchase was approved by the voters. Subsequently, notices for the bond sales were published, and an ordinance was adopted for the purchase when two things came to light. First, Ventura Land and Power Company could not provide proper abstract or title to some of the facilities involved in the proposed sale; and second, the town learned that it could not legally serve a sizeable number of water consumers outside the town limits. On November 6, 1895 an ordinance was adopted that rescinded those enacted in connection with the purchase. This rescinding then cancelled more than two years effort by the proponents of the idea.

The second attempt to take over the company took place in 1905. Again poor water service was responsible for the agitation. This time the company did not offer to sell any of its facilities. The Ventura Town Board of Trustees hired a consultant who estimated that \$125,000 would provide a new pumping system with a high elevation reservoir and a low elevation reservoir and an electric system operated in conjunction with the water pumping engines, capable of serving 50 arc lights for street lighting and 3,000 incandescent lights. On April 22, 1905 the voters approved the bond issue, and on May 5th an ordinance was adopted for the sale of the bonds.

A week later Ventura Water, Light and Power Company through their Ventura attorney, aided by some brilliant legal talent from Los Angeles and New York City, filed a complaint against the town to block the sale of the bonds. The case went to Superior Court in Santa





Oxnard steam plant and substation  
Ventura County Power Co.

Barbara, and on November 11, 1905 the court declared the bond issue invalid because it was in excess of the 2% limit by charter and that such bonds could not be voted for more than ten years.

In all the wrangles the company had with the dissatisfied water users and the collectivists, the latter never advanced or offered any concrete plans for improving the town's water service. There were no wells, and their source of supply would still be the river.

Early in 1907 agitation got under way in Nordhoff and the Ojai Valley for electric service. In 1908 Ventura County Power Company considered extending the 33,000 volt transmission line into Ojai Valley from its Santa Paula substation, but a survey or canvass of the land in the area developed less than 1,000 incandescent lamps and only 150 horsepower of motor load.



No further progress was made until July 30, 1912 when Ojai Power Company was incorporated. Present at that meeting were John J. Burke, who was elected president; M. W. Phillips, elected vice-president and general manager; Edward L. Weist, elected secretary-treasurer; and Daniel A. Smith and J. F. Dennison, directors. Interested in the company financially were Charles M. Pratt, Vice-President of Standard Oil Company of New York; and Edward D. Libbey of Libbey Glass Company.

A power plant was built north of the railroad track along what is now the east side of Montgomery Street. Today Southern California Edison Company's substation occupies the site of that plant. A 50 kilowatt, 660 volt generator, driven by a 100 horsepower oil burning engine, went into service New Year's Day, 1913 and served approximately 300 incandescent lamps. Later in 1913 Ojai Power Company took over the water system. In 1915 a 150 kilowatt Diesel engine driven generator was added.

The year 1912 was noteworthy for two events. 1. The water system operated by Ventura County Power Company in conjunction with the electric plant in Oxnard was sold to the City of Oxnard for \$30,000. 2. Santa Paula Electric Company, which had retained to some extent its corporate identity subsequent to the 1906 consolidation, was officially dissolved at an August 23, 1912 stockholders meeting.

When electric service was first established in Ventura County, the consumer charges were determined by the number and size of lamps connected to the lines. Subsequently, meters were installed and it may be of interest to quote the metered rates for light and power in effect in 1913:

#### LIGHT

9 —	75 KWH	.12 per KWH
76 —	150 KWH	.11 per KWH
151 —	300 KWH	.10 per KWH
301 —	600 KWH	.09 per KWH
601 —	1200 KWH	.08 per KWH
All over	1200 KWH	.07 per KWH

#### POWER

17 —	200 KWH	.06 per KWH
201 —	400 KWH	.05 per KWH
301 —	749 KWH	.04 per KWH
750 —	1000 KWH	\$40.00 per month
1001 —	6666 KWH	.03 per KWH
6667 —	10000 KWH	\$200.00 per month
All over	10000 KWH	.02 per KWH

With the above tariffs the reader may be interested in how Ventura County Power Company fared in metered kilowatt hours and gross revenue. We have selected the 1913 operations:



	KWH	Revenue in dollars
Power for irrigation	958,598	\$22,118.85
Industrial power	697,178	23,033.00
Business lighting	380,101	41,739.50
Residence lighting	353,319	43,693.90
Employees lighting	2,884	208.40
Municipal street lighting	73,203	5,803.30
Total Light and Power	2,465,283	\$136,596.95

#### ELECTRIC CUSTOMERS

Ventura, city and rural	622
Oxnard, city and rural	945
Santa Paula, city and rural	833

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Total            2400

By 1911 the Ventura County Power Company electrical load had increased to the point where the steam units at Oxnard provided inadequate emergency stand-by. The original belt driven units, 75 kilowatts and 125 kilowatts, were abandoned and replaced by a General Electric Curtis horizontal 650 KVA, 2300 volt, turbo-generator. This unit went into service in 1913.

This last increment of 650 kilowatts, and the remaining 300 kilowatt Bullock generator installed in 1907, brought the capability of the plant to 950 kilowatts—still short of adequate emergency stand-by, for the company's purchases from Southern California Edison Company at Castaic sometimes reached 1100 kilowatts. Operating in this fashion is precarious, a situation that sooner or later can have undesirable consequences. The company had these in large doses early in 1914 when a series of outages developed along the line to Castaic. Usually when these outages occurred, the Oxnard plant took care of the Oxnard area with Ventura and the east side of the county out of service until the line was repaired and re-energized. During the last week of January, 1914 Ventura had no electric service for two nights and one and one-half days. This was the "straw that broke the camel's back." The community literally seethed with criticism of the company. Prominent citizens began advocating a city-owned electric system. The press, too, joined the clamor with denunciations of the company's operation and the high rates it charged for the poor service from a 46 mile long transmission line when they should have retained the Race Track generation plant for emergency stand-by, a plant that was almost new when it was dismantled and sold.

The company, realizing that its position and rating with the community's consumers had deteriorated to the near vanishing point, filed an application with the California Railroad Commission (now California Public Utilities Commission) to approve a \$100,000 bond issue, the proceeds of which were to be used in the building of an emergency steam driven stand-by generating plant in Ventura. While the company's application was under study by the commission, people



were on the streets of Ventura soliciting signers on petitions to the city council for a city-owned electric plant.

Into this picture of bitter ferment, two new agencies appeared: Henry E. Huntington and the Pacific Light and Power Corporation. Before continuing with these developments, it may be in order to provide some background for these new arrivals.

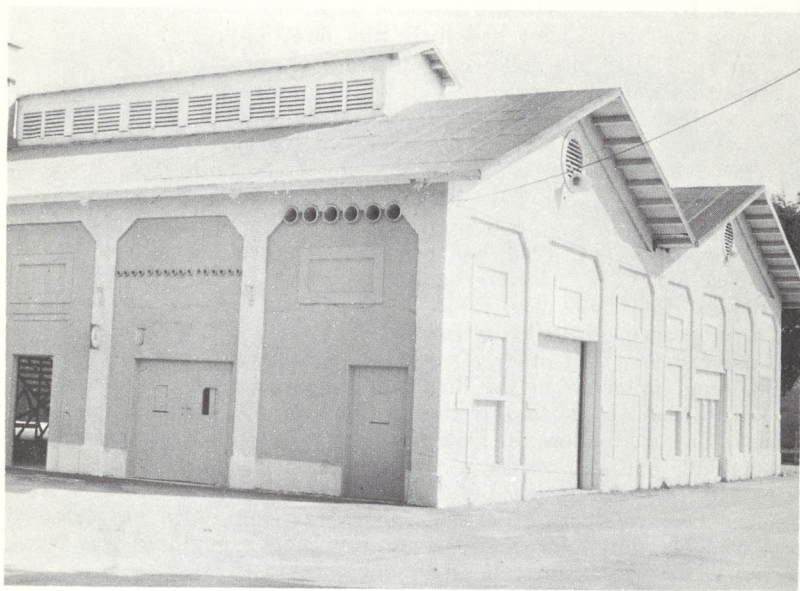
Henry E. Huntington is too well known in California for this writer to undertake any description of his accomplishments. However, pertinent to this story it must be stated that in 1913 he purchased from an estate and from some of Ventura County Power Company executives, securities of the company that placed him in financial control. Subsequently, his block of stock was transferred to the Pacific Light and Power Corporation which became a unit in the industrial empire of Mr. Huntington.

Pacific Light and Power Corporation was incorporated in 1902 as Pacific Light and Power Company and acquired the stock and property of the San Gabriel Electric Company near Azusa. Subsequently a number of other small companies were taken over. In 1907 the company placed in service a plant on the ocean front at Redondo with three 5,000 kilowatt generators driven by double angle, compound condensing engines. These generators had 18,000 volt windings and the output was transmitted at this voltage to the Pacific Electric Railway substation at Dominguez and to a substation of the Los Angeles Railway Company on Santa Barbara Street, south of today's Los Angeles Coliseum. The two railways were also units in the Huntington Empire.

The Pacific Light and Power Company was succeeded by the Pacific Light and Power Corporation in 1910 and provided funds for the construction of dams in the Sierra of Fresno County which created Huntington Lake; the building of a 56 mile railroad, the San Joaquin and Eastern between El Prado and Cascada (now Big Creek); two generating plants, Big Creek 1 and Big Creek 2; and a transmission line operating at the unheard of transmission voltage of 150,000 from Big Creek to Eagle Rock near Los Angeles. In November of 1913 Big Creek 1 went into service with two 17,500 KVA generators, and two months later Big Creek 2 was available with the same capability. All generators were driven by Pelton water wheels.

With output resources of this character, Pacific Light and Power Corporation began looking for additional markets. The company had a substation at San Fernando which was operated in connection with the Pacific Electric Railway system, so the load possibilities in Chatsworth, Santa Susana and the Simi Valley offered some promise. In their surveys of the above areas they no doubt became familiar with Ventura County Power Company's difficulties and extended their surveys and studies well into Ventura County, culminating in a proposal for a transmission line capable of delivering 5,000 kilowatts at the Satco substation.





The building that housed the Race  
Track plant, now Seaside Park

During the first week of April, 1914 Mr. G. C. Ward, representing the Huntington interests, announced acceptance of their proposal by Ventura County Power Company. The announcement further revealed that the water rights held by Ventura Power Company would be sold to the city of Ventura. This development also followed: since construction and operating costs of the new transmission line would be less than those for a new steam generating set-up, the Ventura emergency stand-by plant idea was abandoned. Out of the negotiations between the company and the Huntington organization the latter took over all control of the former. The company, however, retained its old identity of Ventura County Power Company.

The new line from San Fernando was designed for 16,500 volt operation, just half of the Castaic line transmission voltage. To improve operations the old delivery system was changed from 33,000 to 16,500 volts, and all transformers in the several substations were either reconnected or replaced. The money, material and construction crews were supplied by Pacific Light and Power Corporation. With this arrangement the Ventura County Power Company operations were on a loop hook-up with two sources of power available, either of which could serve the system in whole or in part. It was expected



with this type of delivery that outages would be fewer and shorter in duration. By March, 1915 the new line went into service, and so Moorpark and the Simi Valley had their first electricity.

In June 1915 the following officers and directors under the reorganization were announced: G. C. Ward (of Pacific Light and Power Corporation) president; J. A. Driffl, vice-president; F. W. Hunter, vice-president; A. N. Kemp, controller and treasurer; C. V. Showers, secretary; E. R. Davis, W. R. Dunne, and L. S. Lothridge, directors.

Some of the above were subsequently involved in Southern California Edison Company activities. Mr. G. C. Ward at the time of his death, September 11, 1933, had been Edison's president since October 18, 1932. Mr. C. V. Showers became secretary January 19, 1945 and retired in July, 1949. Mr. E. R. Davis was an Edison vice-president for three years prior to his retirement in April, 1948. Mr. A. N. Kemp was on Edison's and other directorates for many years and wielded a profound influence in the financial, commercial and industrial life of California. His death occurred in August, 1955. Mr. L. S. Lothridge at his retirement in December, 1950 was district manager at Santa Paula and still resides in that city.

With the new Pacific Light and Power Corporation line in service, the Oxnard steam generating plant was shut down but retained on "cold stand-by" for emergencies. The plant's engineer was transferred to the operating staff of Saticoy substation.

About this time, in February of 1916, F. W. Hunter of Ventura Power Company, in an address dealing with the company's operations, described one of their difficulties; and we quote from that speech: "The real bane of our existence, however, was or is due to one M. Ramel, a Frenchman, who in 1854, undoubtedly with malice aforethought, sent from Tasmania the seed of what is known as the blue gum tree, which is one of the 150 or more species of the eucalyptus. Some 25 years ago, a Ventura County rancher obtained and planted some of the seed and very soon discovered that the gum trees made a splendid windbreak, especially if planted close enough together and along a public road. Fine; he secured great quantities of seed and planted them. The trees grew. Some of his neighbors secured seed and planted them. Their trees grew. Other neighbors, not to be outdone, started an investigation and discovered the E-Globulus was only one of approximately 150 species of the eucalyptus. Fine—they sent for different kinds of seed, received and planted them. The trees all grew. They are still growing, apparently trying to outgrow each other. The Ventura ranchers like to see things grow, and when there is nothing else to do, they go out and plant eucalyptus trees, and every one of them grows. If you cut one down, immediately from 5 to 25 start growing in its place, and now practically every road in the county has a row of eucalyptus trees on one or both sides of it, and particularly is this true if you have an electric line on it or want to put one there. When the wind blows they sway against the line, foul the wires, and cause them to burn off. If they are too far away to reach the line,



a limb or piece of bark obligingly detaches itself and is blown across the line. If it is raining, they get wet, short the line and kick out a breaker."

The above may be of interest to residents of Ventura County since even at this late date we have so many eucalyptus windbreaks.

In January of 1917 Clarence Lyle Chrisman, son of G. W. Chrisman, former President of Santa Ana Water Company, filed an application with California Railroad Commission for preliminary approval of intention to build and maintain an electric generating plant in the city of Ventura if the city would grant him a franchise. Chrisman stated that he would furnish electricity at lower cost and provide better service than the town now had from the sources outside the county. In view of later Ventura County developments, nothing came of this Chrisman idea.

On May 19, 1917 Sespe Light and Power Company of Los Angeles announced that they had been granted a permit by the State Water Commission to "appropriate 88 cubic feet of water per second from the Sespe River for the generation of 960 theoretical horsepower." The works were to consist of a diversion and storage dam 175 feet high, 2200 feet long on top and 75 feet at the bottom, capable of impounding 57,000 acre feet of water. Total estimated cost of the project was set at two million dollars. Nothing came of this; but in subsequent developments and for the record here, we can reveal that the same company three years later, in May 1920, in a more elaborate announcement stated that several smaller dams and power houses were now planned for the Sespe and the combined capability of the generators was estimated at 20,000 kilowatt hours. Like the first announcement nothing came of this project until in July, 1923 when a San Francisco group called Ventura Power Company (no connection with Ventura County Power Company) was formed to take over the irrigation and power rights of Sespe Light and Power Company. This company (Ventura Power Company) was not able to obtain the necessary financial backing and sometime after 1924 faded out of the picture.

We now return to our main story. During the latter part of August, 1917 Southern California Edison Company announced that application had been filed with California Railroad Commission to purchase the preferred and common stocks and acquire business, franchise, and property as a whole of Pacific Light and Power Corporation which included the electric, gas, and water distribution systems of Ventura Power Company. This acquisition combined the two largest electric companies in Southern California.

No attempt will be made to present in this story a history of Southern California Edison Company. Suffice to say that the company came from the mergers of many small companies, the parent company having been the West Side Light Company of Los Angeles in 1896 since its owners obtained control of the units that eventually became Southern California Edison Company.





General offices of Ventura County  
Power Co., 4th and B streets, Oxnard

Prominent in all of these mergers was a man named John B. Miller who made his home in Pasadena. Mr. Miller was a financial wizard and truly a man of profound vision. The measure of his accomplishments can best be told in the simple language he employed during an interview with Mr. B. C. Forbes, Editor and Publisher of *Forbes Magazine*:

"I saw very clearly that in Los Angeles, Pasadena, Redlands and many other small places there was scope for, and need for, construction work to enable them to go ahead industrially, agriculturally and socially. Each little community had its own little public utility plant. Not one of these plants was capable of supplying any considerable amount of power for any important new industry which might want to locate there.

"Even more awkward, when homes were built a block or two away from the existing poles and wires, no service as a rule, could be furnished for the reason that most of these tiny companies hadn't enough money to extend their facilities. Worse still, electric light was supplied only during certain hours.

"Practically all of these little companies were struggling from hand to mouth. They were not big enough to attract any outside capital in Southern California. Such capital as there was, was absorbed by mercantile interests and by real estate speculators.



"I felt that if a lot of these small light and power companies could be knitted together there would be a better chance of raising the capital to furnish the greatly improved and enlarged facilities which the country badly needed to enable it to forge ahead at a rate that I was sure it was capable of progressing.

"What I aspired to do, however, called for salesmanship more than for anything else. First of all I had to sell to the owners of the different small utility companies the advantages of amalgamation. I found that some of them couldn't quite picture in their imagination the wonderful vision I had. I found them rather cold and it took a lot of warm—not to say hot—enthusiasm on my part to warm them up to the proposition. But I had all the faith and all the zeal of a crusader. I believed ardently in what I had made up my mind I was going to accomplish.

"In five years I had lined up 30 small corporations all over Southern California."

By mid-November, 1917 the small details in connection with the consolidation of Pacific Light and Power Corporation and Ventura County Power Company with Southern California Edison Company were consummated, and the late Nick Hearne, Jr., who had been Local Agent for Ventura County Power Company in Ventura, was transferred to the Oxnard offices as District Agent for Southern California Edison Company.

As in all previous consolidations, Ventura County Power Company immediately became an integral part of the Southern California Edison Company system and operated together as one unit.

With this merger the story of "Ventura County Kilowatts" draws to a close for the Oxnard steam plant, the only installation in the county with electric generators, was dismantled and sold in 1921. All energy distributed in Ventura County came from generators and transmission lines of Southern California Edison Company.

Subsequent to the consolidation and as a epilogue to this story, three events came to pass that should be recorded for they involved the final disposition of operations that began during the days of Ventura County Power Company. A brief description of these follows:

In May, 1918 the electric load in the Ojai Valley exceeded the capability of the Diesel engine-driven generators in the Ojai plant, so a wholesale purchase arrangement with the Southern California Edison Company was negotiated. A 16,000 volt line was built from Ventura and three 100 kilowatt transformers were installed at the old Ojai plant. The engines were permanently shut down and dismantled.

On April 30, 1928 Ojai Power Company was dissolved and the system was purchased by Southern California Edison Company for \$215,378. All operations in the Ojai area were taken over by the Ventura District of the Edison Company and Mr. M. W. Phillips, President and Manager of Ojai Power Company, was appointed Division Manager of Edison's San Joaquin Valley districts. Upon his retirement June 1, 1946 he returned to his first love, the Ojai Valley. Mr.



Phillips died January 15, 1957.

The second event took place on February 28, 1919. Southern California Edison Company disposed of the gas system in Ventura County and in the city of Santa Barbara. The purchaser was the Southern Counties Gas Company who paid \$825,000 for the facilities. Since we have mentioned Santa Barbara, it is worth recording that at the time of the Ventura County consolidation with Edison, the city's gas and electric systems were under Edison management by stock control, but electrically separated by nearly 100 miles from any other physical Edison property. The city was served by an isolated steam generating plant.

In 1918 the 66,000 volt lines that had been built into Ventura County from Castaic were extended to Santa Barbara. The steam plant was shut down and used for emergency only until destroyed by the Santa Barbara earthquake in June, 1925.

The third event involved the sale to the city of the water system in Ventura on March 1, 1923 by the Southern California Edison Company. The selling price was \$220,000.

Early in this installment we stated that in 1913 there were 2,400 Ventura County electric consumers. At the start of 1959 Edison's list of Ventura County consumers had grown in number to 57,951. To maintain a steady lead in electric service over the needs of the population here and in the contiguous area, Edison in 1959 put into operation the ultra-modern \$56,700,000 Mandalay steam generating station. Rising more than ten stories high over the sands of Mandalay Beach, this steam station now has two generators with nameplate ratings totaling 440,000 kilowatts—great enough to provide electricity for a population of close to one million.

Transmission of the electric power generated at Mandalay has brought further heavy investment by Edison in Ventura County. For instance, the Santa Clara substation was constructed at a cost of \$3,600,000; the Mandalay-Santa Clara and the Saugus-Santa Clara 220,000 volt transmission lines, which distribute Mandalay's energy, were built at respective costs of \$2,400,000 and \$3,800,000.

The year 1959, therefore, introduces a new story about "Ventura County Kilowatts", an account that will tell of old fashioned American free enterprise by a business managed company striving to provide a better service to its consumers and preparing to meet a phenomenal area growth and development. For these accomplishments it undertook all of the risks. It was a big undertaking requiring a total investment in the county of \$66,500,000, but the job never meant a single penny of cost to taxpayers. Verily, the opposite is the case for "Ventura County Kilowatts" became one of the county's two largest taxpayers.

May the next historian find the above paragraph appropriate for introducing the new story; and in conclusion, may that writer have some of the fascinating and unusual experiences this contributor enjoyed while preparing this account for the *Quarterly* of the Ventura County Historical Society.



# The Briggs School Story

By the Seventh and Eighth Grade Students  
of Briggs School

The first school in what is now the Briggs District was opened on the A. W. Beckwith property and was called "Saticoy." It was in the fall of 1869 in the home of Colonel Stevens, and the teacher was Miss Augusta Stevens. She taught eight pupils from four families who lived in the district. Miss Stevens' pupils were Eva and Etta Ricker; Luela, Wilmer, and Mary Akers; Horace and Alice Stevens; and Eli Emmuck. The parents of the eight children paid the teacher's salary. The next year, on a site which is now where the Glen Good home is located, a new schoolhouse was built. The instructor was Miss Laura Cornwall.

In the first school there was just a bench; no desks were in the second and third grades until the third term. When Miss Carrie Larson taught, students received seats and desks made of redwood. They were connected by a 4x4, and they were all the same height. They used slates and pencils because there were no blackboards. Their pencils were made by pounding a lead bullet flat and then rolling it until it looked like a slate pencil.

George G. Briggs, for whom the school was named, was originally from Ohio. He came to California at the time of the gold fever and went into the raising of deciduous fruits near Marysville where he accumulated considerable wealth. He came to what is now Ventura County in 1862 and purchased the Santa Paula y Saticoy Rancho. Briggs had planned to plant the rancho into deciduous fruit orchards, but his wife died suddenly in 1864. His plans were never fulfilled. He went back to Marysville and did not return to this region again. The old rancho was broken up into 150-acre farms in 1867 but was known as the "Briggs Ranch" for many years. It was natural, therefore, that his name should be applied to the first school.

The first *public* school was located near the northwest corner of Cummings and West Telegraph roads. Attending the first public school, taught by Julius Alvord, were approximately twenty pupils. Succeeding Alvord as teachers were Miss Carrie Larson and Miss Hallie Bradshaw. The schoolhouse was used for dances, Sunday school classes, community gatherings, weddings, and even funerals.

In the early days the chief occupation of the community people was the raising of cattle, hogs, and grains. At the turn of the century most of the land was planted with beans, apricots, and walnuts. Later, realization of the market value of citrus products caused many land owners to venture into the citrus industry, and thousands of walnut trees were replaced by citrus trees.

In the year of 1876 Briggs School burned to the ground, and a two room building was erected. Miss Marie Sparks was the teacher. The following year a "shirttail" building was built for school uses on the M.D.L. Todd property. The teacher was a Mr. Boor.





Briggs School Student Body, 1885

Abner Haines set aside one acre of land in 1881 for school purposes and it is part of the site on which the school is presently located at the corner of Briggs and West Telegraph roads. The "shirttail" building was moved to this new location. Regular double desks were made by the men of the community. Water was supplied by the pupils, who carried it from the Olmstead place across the road. A "progressive school" was in session with Miss Julia Anderson as the teacher.

In January of 1882 Briggs School was nearly blown down by a hard east wind. George W. Faulkner, a local rancher living just west of the school, recorded the event in his diary: "Went to Santa Paula to get blacksmithing done. Terrible east wind. Put up fence and propped schoolhouse." A few days later Mr. Faulkner wrote: "Cleaned buggy wheels and painted them. Helped straighten up schoolhouse."

The period from 1881 to 1900 was marked by a steady deterioration in the school plant. On January 31, 1894 the *Santa Paula Chronicle* published the following letter:

"Editor Chronicle: Although fully recognizing the perfect right of each and every man to vote as he sees fit, we wish to inquire why ten voters in Briggs district thought it right to refuse the small sum



of money necessary to shut off the draughts, which each day invite pneumonia; provide a new stove, as each day the property is endangered by the worn out condition of the old one; furnish water which Mr. Faulkner kindly offers if the voters will lay pipe, etc., at a cost of about \$40; provide the teacher with necessary furniture, the furniture at present consisting of a rickety table and a wooden chair furnished by a neighbor; paint the house, thereby preserving and protecting it from decay; and provide some much and long needed blackboards.

"All these things we think it almost a crime to deny the children. True, the children asked that a safe place be provided for the care of the library books, and an organ, also to have the grounds beautified by trees and shrubs at a cost of forty dollars.

"The want of these things does not perhaps endanger health or life, but without question the house and grounds at Briggs school are the most disreputable of any in the county. All this notwithstanding there is hardly a foreign voter in the district.

"What of the intelligence and progress of the American who rides several miles and spends a day to vote NO, whose tax would have been seventy cents, even if an organ, shrubbery, and a library were not provided when he went to school? What of those other Americans whose children were made uncomfortable, their health impaired, their progress retarded, for want of a few hundred dollars, rather than tax themselves five or six dollars, because children have better opportunities than they had; and what of those rich Americans whose children were educated at public expense and whose grandchildren are growing into the public school, but who came and voted an emphatic NO.

"When next the 'Eagle screams' of the broad-minded liberality, culture and progress of the American citizen, let them except a few at least of the honest voters of Briggs."

At least the school district could boast of the tallest flagpole in the county. All Ventura County turned out to witness its dedication in front of the schoolhouse in 1891. The pole was eighty feet in height and supported a proud "Old Glory" 16 by 24 feet in size. This flagpole was salvaged from a schooner which was wrecked off the coast of Ventura. M. D. L. Todd was master of ceremonies and much credit was given Mrs. Clara Beem, the teacher at the time, for her efforts in obtaining the first flagpole for the school.

About 1900 the district started a complete rejuvenation of the school plant. A bond issue was voted and passed. According to the *Ventura Free Press*: "Briggs district voted last Saturday on the question of issuing bonds to the amount of \$4500 to provide a new school building. There were but eleven votes cast against the proposition. Briggs will now have a new two-room building to replace the unsightly building which when built was the best in the county but has now become a decidedly back number. The trustees will soon call for bids, and it is hoped to have the new building ready by the opening of the fall term."



The school was so greatly improved that about 1918 the *Blue Bulletin of the State Department of Education* stated: "This (Briggs) is a model country district. It has two modern up-to-date buildings four miles apart, with five teachers. It levies a special tax each year of \$4000. One of the schools is composed entirely of Mexican children. In the upper room every pupil belongs to the Red Cross. The clerk of the school board is a public-spirited citizen who takes great interest in the school activities . . . The most remarkable part of the story is that the teachers have been there for years refusing positions in the neighboring city of Los Angeles.

"The attention of those eager reformers who have been making the welkin ring with strident criticisms and denunciations of the rural schools is respectfully called to the Briggs district in Ventura County as one affording excellent opportunities for rural children in rural conditions."

Professor Simmons organized the first orchestra at Briggs School in 1923. It only had about a dozen students in it. The same year John McGinnis came to be principal.

Mr. McGinnis had been principal at Isbell School, but when the first World War broke out he left his position and went to France as a Y.M.C.A. worker. After the war was over, he was associated with the University of Southern California. He was offered the job as principal at Briggs in 1923, and he accepted.

Mr. McGinnis proved to be one of the most popular principals Briggs School ever had. One of his pet projects was the annual Halloween party to which the Oliveland students and teachers would walk over to and see in the morning and walk back to Oliveland after it was over. Mr. McGinnis also liked to get out and play with the boys, and he was forever playing tricks on the teachers. Few pupils in 1924 will ever forget how he pushed the teachers in the Santa Clara River while returning from a nature study trip. The weather *was* hot.

On April 11, 1925 a bond election of \$80,000 was passed for the construction of the present school building. Mr. McGinnis, who was district superintendent for fifteen years, gave a dedicatory address.

Oliveland School, which is a part of the Briggs School District, was built in 1913 on the present site of one and one-half acres. The land was purchased from the Limoneira Company for \$10. Originally, the school at Oliveland was solely for Mexican children.

Briggs School has achieved nationwide fame with its school paper, *Briggs Pepper Box*. The paper was started by one of the teachers, Miss Louise Dunlap. A copy was sent to President Calvin Coolidge, and Miss Dunlap received the following note from the White House in reply: "Will you be good enough to thank your pupils on behalf of the President for their thoughtfulness in sending a copy of their school paper, The Pepper Box." The school has received several awards of merit for the *Pepper Box* in the years that followed.



# Ventura County at the Columbian Exposition

By ROBERT PFEILER

California in the 1890's was determined and eager to let the rest of the world know of its importance as a rapidly expanding agricultural center. For this reason it enthusiastically maintained a complete exhibit at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in the year 1893.

On March 6, 1891 the California Legislature passed an act appropriating money to pay the expenses of maintaining an exhibit at the World's Fair in Chicago. The Governor of California appointed seven commissioners to represent each of the congressional districts within the state. These representatives, known as the "California World's Fair Commission" had complete charge and control of the expenditure of all money appropriated by the State of California for the construction of buildings and maintaining an exhibit of the products of California. The seven commissioners received no compensation for their services, but were allowed their actual traveling expenses, not to exceed \$2,000 each.

The sum of \$300,000 was appropriated out of the State Treasury to pay for the erection of buildings and the collection and maintenance of an exhibit at the fair.

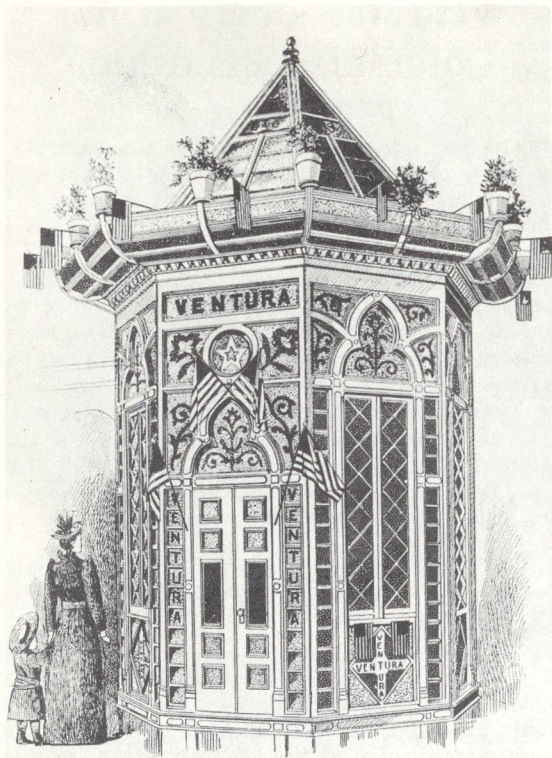
The same legislature in 1891, while revising the County Government Act, included a provision which authorized the various counties of the state to make appropriations for the World's Fair purposes. Ventura County expended \$7,000, the maximum allowed it, in order to make an adequate display of the products grown in this area.

The California Building was erected at a site located in a portion of Jackson Park in Chicago. It typified early California architecture in that it was Mission and Moorish in style. It was 435 feet by 144 feet, and was from two to three stories in height. The cost of the complete building, including gas and electric light fixtures, plumbing, etc., was about \$106,000.

The Ventura County exhibit, a Bean Pagoda, was an octagonal structure, 23½ feet high and 12 feet in diameter. There were 7,056 pieces of redwood and 1,236 pieces of glass used in its construction. This made available 615 cases for beans. Around the top of the roof was wrought in beans the following legend: "Do you know beans when the bag is open?" The name of the county, "Ventura," was spelled in beans vertically on the outside 22 times. There were 40 artistic designs in beans around the pagoda above the doors and windows, and two five-pointed white stars with red center star, all beans, ornamented the frieze over the double door.

Nearly 2,000 pounds of beans, representing 83 varieties, were used in the peculiar structure which was intended to call especial attention to this one product; Ventura being the largest bean-pro-





BEAN PAGODA OF VENTURA COUNTY, IN CALIFORNIA BUILDING,  
WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION.

ducing county in the state, and containing the largest bean farm in the world. This farm was owned by Dixie W. Thompson, a man who planted nearly 37 tons of beans each year. It is said that one variety of beans used in the pavilion cost \$50 a bushel, and another variety cost \$10 a bushel.

The Ventura County exhibit was designed in accordance with the ideas of Captain Nehemiah Blackstock of Ventura, father of Superior Court Judge Charles F. Blackstock. Captain Blackstock, a Confederate veteran, came here in the early 1870's and practiced law, dealt in real estate, and was elected Justice of the Peace. He was appointed to the State Banking Commission about 1900, and so served until he moved to Los Angeles as president of a building and loan concern. George C. Power, the architect for the exhibit, was noted also as a local lemon grower and architectural engineer.

F. A. Foster was in charge of the arrangement of the beans. A brother of E. P. Foster, he was a member of the County Board of Supervisors and was appointed by his fellow members to collect ex-



hibits throughout the county. The Grand Jury ruled that Foster, as a supervisor, could not collect additional pay and mileage from the Exposition Fund, as the fund was county money. There was quite a "stink" over the matter, and Foster finally settled by repaying the amount received and resigning from the board. In those days it was quite a job to cover Ventura County by team and rail, and I would say that Foster earned his money, although his appointment was illegal.

The interior of the pagoda was used by Captain W. H. A. Thompson, manager of the exhibit, as an office and a reception room for guests. Upon a table was the largest single register in the building with an invitation to visitors to record their names. Thompson, a resident of West Saticoy, was a little of everything; a newspaper man, a realtor, an attorney, and what have you. But primarily he was a promoter whose principal efforts were directed toward promoting Captain W. H. A. Thompson's pocketbook.

It is interesting to note that Ventura County was not the only California exhibitor to use the Far East motif in the form of a pagoda. The Los Nietos and Ranchito walnut growers displayed their products in a pagoda described as "an eight-sided prism of glass in silvery frame work, about 6 feet in diameter and 12 feet high, with pointed roof, showing large-sized walnuts behind each crystal panel." This was part of an exhibit of the Southern California World's Fair Association, an organization that Ventura County contributed heavily to in fruits and other farm products. Included in the fruits were oranges, lemons, pomelos, shaddocks, figs, olives, loquats, apricots, and grapes.

Honey was an important product of the county at this time, and quite a display was prepared for the fair. It was claimed that some of the honey shown was gathered from the blossoms of lima beans a year before the Exposition, being deposited in glass jars by the bees themselves.

Many of the items listed never became important economic factors in Ventura County, or if they did, have long since lost any position they may have held. However, in the *Final Report of the California World's Fair Commission* there is one interesting portion of a sentence: "and in the California exhibit in the Mines and Mining Building a display of petroleum, of which this county (Ventura) is the largest producer in the State." The black gold that was to become the most important single factor in the county's economy did not even rate one complete sentence in 1893!

Once the Fair was over, the problem confronted the Commission as to what to do with the California Building. It was hoped that the Commissioner's offer of the building to the South Park Commissioners of Chicago for museum purposes would be accepted, but was rejected due to the *instability* of the building. It was finally disposed of at auction for \$500.



## Miscellany

From the files of the *Ventura Signal*

Our Canyon school, Mr. Orr teacher, has 45 pupils enrolled. Average daily attendance, 40. (Present Avenue School. Teacher, the late Orestes Orr.) September 28, 1878.

Dr. Delmont has on exhibition a tapeworm measuring over 100 feet in length. It was taken recently from a patient. November 2, 1878.

The old adobes back of the old Mission Church are being torn down and a substantial board fence built around the Mission garden. March 22, 1879.

The stage upset Wednesday night at Punta Gorda, this side of Rincon. No one was hurt and but little damage. Such is the result of night staging, with the lives of people in jeopardy. March 22, 1879.

On next Saturday night the people of Santa Paula will give one of their entertainments for the purpose of raising funds with which to start a library. This is a good cause and should be liberally patronized. March 29, 1879.

The county road between Santa Paula and Ojai is being opened. It will be a great improvement on the old one as it is much shorter. March 29, 1879.

N. W. Blanchard killed and packed one hundred head of hogs the past winter at Santa Paula. April 19, 1879.

They are cutting down the trees so fast in some of the western states that ten years from now it will be an extensive job to lynch a man. April 19, 1879.

The Telegraph Stage Co. will shortly put on extra stages to run between Santa Paula and Santa Barbara, stages both ways making the trip in daylight, stopping at this place (Ventura) for dinner. This is a good move, and we hope it will be duly appreciated by the traveling public. April 26, 1879.

Santa Paula had a big ratification Thursday night over the new Constitution. May 10, 1879.

A Southern paper informs us that Mary Brown "bust her boiler on Tuesday last," and we were just about making up our mind that perhaps Mary had been lighting the fire with kerosene, when the paper informs us that three of her deck passengers were instantly killed. This last statement leads us to infer that Mary was a steamboat. May 10, 1879.



## *Membership*

### LIFE

Philip Bard  
Mrs. Edith Hoffman  
Mrs. Grace Smith  
Mrs. Robert G. Haley  
Walter Wm. Hoffman  
John P. Thille  
Grace S. Thille

### SUSTAINING

Richard Bard  
Roger Edwards  
A. C. Hardison  
Mrs. and Mrs. Milton M. Teague

## *Half a Century of Service*

*Ventura County Mutual Fire Insurance Co.* Organized on April 4, 1898 with E. P. Foster, president; Nathan Blanchard, vice-president and Charles Barnard, secretary. This old Ventura County business firm has faithfully followed the high standards set by its pioneer founders.

*Santa Paula Savings and Loan Association.* Organized in April 1890 as the Santa Paula Building and Loan Association with J. R. Haugh, president; Caspar Taylor, vice-president and H. H. Youngken, secretary. This organization has served the interests of home owners and builders, as well as those of the investor.

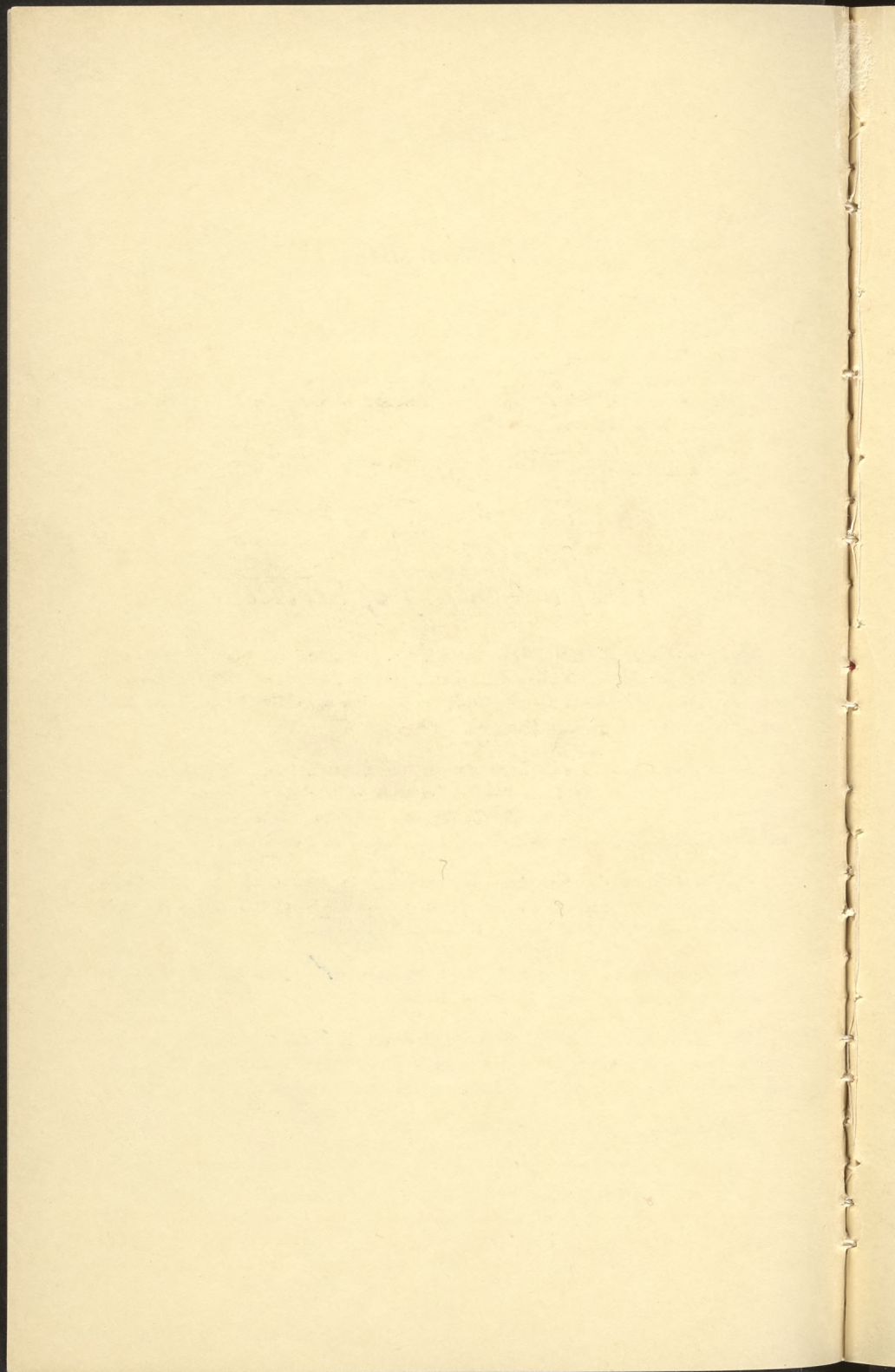
*Peoples Lumber Co.* This firm was organized in 1890 by a host of Ventura County pioneers. It has served the construction needs of its founders, their descendants, and countless thousands of newcomers.

*County Stationers, Inc.,* 532 E. Main, Ventura. Since 1898 Ventura County's complete stationer and office furniture dealer.

*Bank of A. Levy,* 143 W. Fifth St., Oxnard. Founded in 1900 by the late Achille Levy, who came to Hueneme in 1875. Since its inception Bank of A. Levy has been closely allied with the farm and ranch industries of Ventura County.

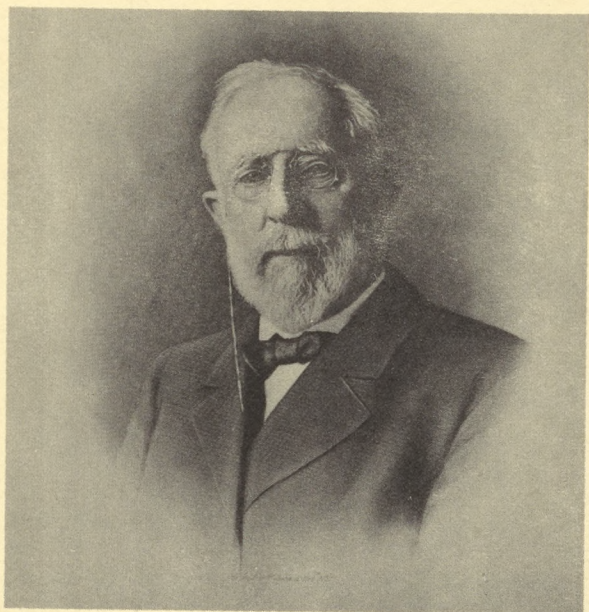
*Title Insurance and Trust Company*







*The*  
VENTURA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
*QUARTERLY*



NATHAN W. BLANCHARD

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NOVEMBER, 1959

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# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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The Ventura County Historical Society's headquarters is the Pioneer Museum, 77 North California Street, Ventura, California. There are three classes of membership—active, \$5 per year, sustaining, \$25 per year and life, \$100.

The QUARTERLY is published in February, May, August and November from the Society's headquarters at the Pioneer Museum. The editorial staff is composed of Chas. F. Outland, Chairman, Mrs. D. A. Cameron, Mrs. C. R. Nieland, Grant Heil and Robert Pfeiler.

The Society assumes no responsibility for the statements or opinions of authors of various articles. All communications should be addressed to the Society at the Pioneer Museum. Memberships include subscription to the QUARTERLY. Additional copies are available at \$1.00 each.

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# The Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly

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VOL. V, NO. 1

NOVEMBER, 1959

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## A Matter of Policy

The biographical portions of our numerous county histories have portrayed our forefathers as being paragons of everything from industriousness to virtue. If we were to take all this quite seriously, the study of local history would soon degenerate into a mild form of ancestor worship. Fortunately, these pioneers of ours were also human beings. Their political convictions were often expressed in terms that would make even a Harold Ickes blush. At times they could be intolerant of their neighbor's religious beliefs to a point of fanaticism, and they were not hesitant in expressing themselves on the matter. Their opinions of certain prominent individuals, often recorded in letters and diaries, leave little doubt that they thought the party in question would better serve his community by a long sojourn in San Quentin rather than running loose among the more "righteous" members of society.

The recording of these less desirable traits of human nature in a publication such as the *Quarterly* presents something of a problem. This is particularly true in those cases where the individual involved happens to have descendants living in the county, men and women who are recognized as being among our most prominent and best loved citizens. However, the editorial staff feels that the deleting of such references from otherwise interesting source material will in no way contribute to a better understanding of our historical background. Only in those cases where the bounds of good taste are exceeded should the staff exercise the function of censor. Where provable misstatements of fact are made, then the error will be footnoted or explained.

The reader should always bear two things in mind: 1. The opinions expressed in material of the kind in question were those of the person writing it and not that of the editorial staff. 2. If the reader still feels he must pass judgment, then let him use the legal and moral codes of the day in which the writer lived and not those of today.



# Memoirs of a Santa Paula Sheepherder

1873 - 1875

From the letters of Colonel W. J. Sanborn

In Ventura County, California, the mountains come down to the shore and the town of San Buenaventura was crowded in between the shore and the mountains and valleys on either side. The old mission was there at the point of the mountains and the town grew up around it. In my day it was our trading town, when I was in the sheep business in the Santa Clara Valley, to the right or south of the town. To the left, or north, was a small valley and some ten miles up that valley was a small, widely known health resort village—Ojai. About ten miles up the Santa Clara Valley, somewhere south of Ojai, was the village of Santa Paula. Nowadays the city of Santa Paula has a population of some 8,000, but in my day—the early seventies—about 150, with a post office and two small stores (mostly office in one of the stores.)

Ventura was then about 1,000 to 1,500—now about a dozen thousand. Ojai then had about 75 inhabitants, and now a couple of thousand. Kindly note how each of these towns has improved after I went.

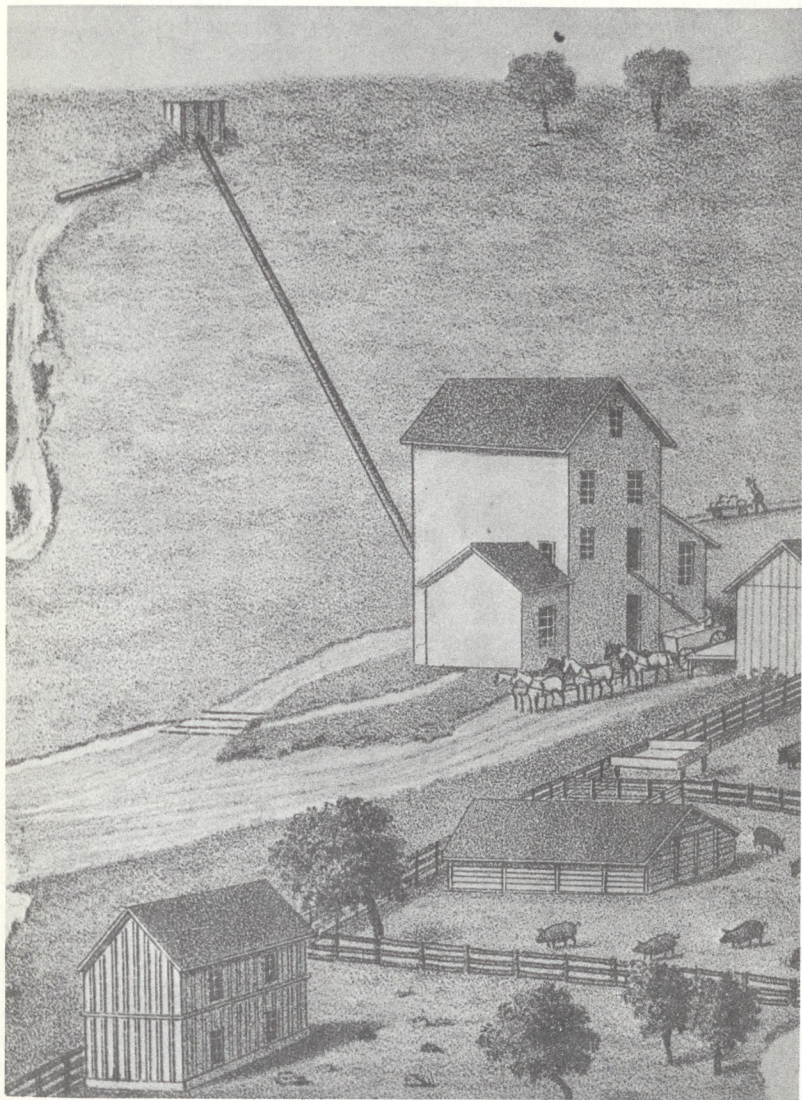
A rather small canyon ran from Santa Paula into the mountains and about the mountain tops it met a smaller one leading out on the north side at Ojai. There was a kind of a road up there, but there was nothing really kind about it. The road passed through the petroleum region of that section where springs of warm, clear as crystal petroleum bubbled from the mountains and coursed down the mountain side to be entirely deposited within a few hundred feet as soft, black, sticky "black oil" which in time hardened to a petroleum asphaltum. Years after my time methods of handling were brought out and Santa Paula became an oil town.

Blanchard and Bradley (I never saw Mr. Bradley and think he was a non-resident partner, but knew Blanchard quite well) took a small stream out of the canyon and put it in a ditch, built a flouring mill for water power, and for years carried on a large business with the mill. They also ran the ditch well up on the side of the foothills in the direction of Ventura, and brought considerable land under the ditch, the first irrigation of that section.

Blanchard and Bradley were very enterprising. Under the ditch they grew in 1873 and 1874 the first alfalfa known in California. They also planted under the ditch the first ten acres of lemons in that whole region. They ran a bunch of 2500 to 3000 sheep on the range on the other side of the valley and to the south of the Santa Clara River. Howard and I had the next range west and ran some 1500 to 2000 sheep.

We all had good grade stock and used Spanish Merino bucks. Then French Merino bucks were brought in, but not with great favor. However, out of it we produced what we called an American Merino which was a good woolled sheep and having what we then felt were





Blanchard and Bradley's Flour Mill as  
depicted by the artist in 1882



more desirable features than the Spanish and French for wool; namely, good ranging and good breeding, etc. They did not afford heavy lambs for market, but none of us cared about that. Blanchard and Bradley had an idea of their own and they were very aggressive. They brought in some Shropshire bucks, the first in that country—small elephants alongside of our Merinos. They brought in bucks and a few ewes and selected a bunch of their largest and most active Merino ewes for crossing. They carefully selected ewes that came into the breeding season early and served them with the Shropshires and I think got three lots of ewes, each bunch of ewes bringing in the Shropshire cross for three years. They fenced their alfalfa into small tracts, turned the ewes and lambs into the alfalfa, and crowded the lambs for weight and fat. They shipped from Ventura by boat, the lambs going to the San Francisco market, and got good prices, giving the best weight and the best meat then to be had. They also bred purebred Shropshires for sale. For a time they raised heaps of big lambs.

These were the first Shropshires in that country, being big, coarse, drywooled sheep, almost more hairy than wooly. In 1875 came the great dry year which had a very damaging effect on all stock growing on the ranges in that section of the state. I got bust. However, I was a youngster and had gone out there to keep from going to a cemetery back in Massachusetts. So far I have kept pretty well out of heading one of those processions.

It may be that some of your friends would be slightly interested in the Shropshire entrance into that then wonderful sheep region, also in the early heavy lambs for the San Francisco market. As I look back at it, the sheep business was then most wonderfully crude and lacking in business judgment from almost every side, but the cattle business was just about as badly managed.

In those days our 'other' population was made up of Californians, some few Spanish, Mexicans and Mexican Indians, all with a decided Spanish leaning. In eating the sheep, a certain section of the entrail called the "milk gut" was much sought after and was made into a sort of pudding—very excellent. The heart of the sheep was valued highly, but among all those Spanish inclined people no sheep, beef, or deer heart, or auricle, was ever cooked until the tip end was cut off. If rightly taken care of, it should at once be buried in the ground. By doing this they carried out their belief that sins and wrong doings were heavy and sought the lower levels, finally dropping clear, clean, all the way to Hell. So that in the little lamb all its evil, ugliness and viciousness, terror, robbery, murder, drunkenness, etc. of course settled to the lowest points. As all passed through the heart, the awfully bad had centered in the lower point and had to be cut away, else the one who ate it was liable to get those sins into him. If he did not eat the southern extremity of the heart the patient seemed to do very nicely. If only this custom had been carried on up to date think of the wonderful world in which we would be living, but this dose of history must not make me philosophize<sup>1</sup>.



Mount Dora, Florida  
August 4, 1938

Mr. V. M. Freeman  
Santa Paula, California  
My Dear Sir:

Glad to have yours of the 27th ult. Sort of makes me smile—"117 North Tenth Street." In my day there were two stores on the only road through the valley—Ventura to the Soledad Pass—and beyond into the desert. The stores were practically opposite each other. Wiley Brothers ran one, and in it was the Post Office, with two mails a day by stage, one up the valley through to Los Angeles, the other down the valley and to Santa Barbara and to the railway terminal (I think at Gilroy.)

As to your question, I am not sure, but I have a sort of feeling that there was the remains of an ancient adobe building near the mouth of the canyon at Blanchard and Bradley's and on the east side of the road that reached the oil springs and through to Ojai. The ditch was brought down on the west side of the road. I have no further knowledge of anything like an old ruin in the region.

Other than Mr. Blanchard about the only old friend I can recall is Jake Gries. Lived at a corner of the road about a mile or so west of the village<sup>2</sup>. A fine upstanding rough-and-ready man of the type that stood out in those days. Do they tell the story of his heading a hanging-party one nice afternoon down toward Hueneme? I rather think Jake was then one of the County Commissioners. No action was ever taken—considered a good job and well done.

We then had a place on the upper end of the tract that was about back of Jake's and extended down the river and over the hills to the lines of the ranch on the other side. About opposite Jake's place was a very nice large place owned by a Mr. Sewell, who came down from Santa Barbara County and before that from the Sacramento Valley<sup>3</sup>. I had known him when I was clerk in the bank at Santa Barbara before I went to the Santa Clara country. Also I knew T. Wallace More of Santa Barbara County who owned a large tract up the valley from Santa Paula and who was murdered by the squatters over the matter of lines. In my day E. B. Higgins of Saticoy was the big man in that section. He had a brother Charlie who went up on the More Tract and I felt was conspicuous in the racket<sup>4</sup>. That took place after I went from there, but had been on the fire cooking for years. Great country in those days. I used to know "Bill" Richards (W.D.F. Richards) well at Saticoy—well to do rancher there—whom I understand established a school at Saticoy long after I left.

In those days Blanchard and Bradley sold a heavy oil from the springs in the hills, to the streetcar folks in 'Frisco for curve grease on the tracks<sup>5</sup>. Beers drove the team—18 mules, bull-tongued wagon we used to call such, wagon and trailer. Carried some 20-30 barrels of that oil from up in the mountains to Ventura for shipment—one day to Ventura and one day back.



The first ditch that I knew anything about was a small SANCA°—as we used to call it—that was taken out of the Santa Clara River about half a mile above our upper line and brought down to the Cameron place. I think the Camerons took it out a year or two before Howard and I went in there. My recollection is that we made no use of it other than for water for our horses and domestic animals—it was not high enough for use on our cultivated land, which was on a bench up from the river bottom.

The published letter you spoke of was simply a friendly letter to Col. Ed. Wentworth of the Armour Co. at Chicago—a personal friend of mine. Colonel is writing a book of sheep. His aged mother lives next door to us here, and Ed's wife being down ransacked my library one day to find anything possible about sheep for the Colonel's book. One day after she had gone back to Chicago, this matter of Blanchard and Bradley's Shropshire sheep came to my recollection. I sat down and rapidly wrote to him with never a thought of getting it into print.

Now that you-all are highly civilized in that region, do they ever tell stories of the days of the Vasquez-Chaves gang of stage robbers, cut-throats, cattle-rustlers, etc.? They were the worst and last of such gangs in the country. Antone Chaves threw his arms about my neck and KISSED me one day out on the desert. He did that instead of killing us and driving off our cattle. I had saved his life several years before at a time when there was a reward for him DEAD-OR-ALIVE. It is but fair to say that I did not know I was saving the rascal's life, simply when I helped a traveler in distress at night. His horse fell on him—sprained ankle, etc. Years afterward I found out how I had missed that reward.

Well, I've made quite a letter of this and given you not the information you seek. Say! It just comes to me that I used to know that great sort of God-Almighty chap—Richards—was it not—down at Hueneme who used to drive in a high dogcart painted all the colors of the rainbow and a few more. Three horses driven tandem with a "servant" on the single seat back of his high single seat. Drive for show. He was the chap whom the Philadelphia folks sent out to develop the oil along in the 1860's. It didn't do any developing under him but later<sup>7</sup>. He was one swell guy—G-GOSH?

Very cordially yours,  
W. J. Sanborn

August 27, 1938

My Dear Sir:

Noting yours of the 10th duly at hand some days since, I am very glad to have given you some information . . .

I was in that region about three years off and on. I was in the bank at Santa Barbara in 1872—went from Massachusetts on account of my health—T.B. After about a year in the bank my health giggered back and I had a renewal of trouble and got out of the bank into the open. I wandered into Santa Paula not headed anywhere especially. I





Jake Gries

met Mr. Joseph Howard of Santa Barbara, a very intimate friend, at Blanchard's sheep dip<sup>s</sup>. E. B. Higgins was having some sheep dipped; he and Howard were there. Howard had bought some sheep of Higgins that were on the range beyond the Camulos Ranch, the del Valle's. Howard wanted me to go up there with him and Higgins, get those sheep and drive them down to the tract he had just bought back of Gries's and above the Cameron place. I did so with the result that I entered into partnership with Howard on the sheep matter. While there my time was taken looking after our sheep. I did not herd save on rare occasions, but Howard looked after the farming and some other matters of his, and the entire sheep management was turned over to me. I stuck close and tried to attend to it. But the over-stocked ranges and the dry year of 1875 closed us out. Howard later bought a large tract over on the Conejo near Newbury Park and dipped into cattle. Early in 1876 I pulled away and went up to the Bay, Frisco. That summer I traveled over quite an area of Central California, and in the fall went back to Saticoy, getting there just in time to vote. The Dems, tried hard to throw out my vote but it stuck and was one of the half-dozen or so in the final round-up that elected the M.C. from the district . . .

There was a bit of a hill region over the Santa Clara River—south side of the valley—and it ran out a few miles below our place. It was there called the Punta de la Loma. In those days a man having an acreage facing the river claimed the hill range opposite his river front-



age over to the ranch lines on the other side. Up the valley from us was Blanchard and Bradley taking their hill range. Then we came, Howard and Sanborn, and next was E. B. Higgins. The Camerons were not in stock. Next was the Point where there was a large sheep ranch and quite a nest of buildings. The stage line crossed over there from Saticoy and on to Los Angeles. I think the stage station was on the tract. It was known as the Antonio Schiappa Pietra tract. Whether they were Spanish or Italians I never knew. They never invited intercourse with others—kept pretty much entirely to themselves. They ranged that whole end of the Punta de la Loma and on the other side clear up to our lines and once tried to run me out; but I never budged.

I never knew anything of the valley for any distance above our lines across the river. Things were very different there in those days. Then it was one's business to know what was within his own lines, and there he stopped. He had no right to be peeking over the tract of another stock man. It would have been a, "What you lookin' for HERE?" Then it would have been passed about that so-and-so was doing a lot of nosing around—"better keep an eye on the fellow, what the 'ell is he trying to find out?" In those days the place to find out was the spot where the owner lived, and there you'd be able to get all the information the owner cared to afford you. So, I never knew much of anything of the valley above our place save along the highway. I never was a mile up the river above our lines in back of Jake Gries's. I knew where the ditch I spoke of in the other letter was taken out—had been there several times to look at it, for the Sanka ran through our farm lands and close to the house; and we took stock water, wash water, etc. from it, so we had an interest in that ditch.

Sunday

We've been having some mighty hot weather, for us, here. We have had it 92 for two days, and points about us have been much warmer. But the entire north, east of the Mississippi, is likewise getting pretty hot. This is especially true in and around Washington and in spots where Jim Farley and that old mirage chaser, F. D. R., are. I so call him because I have seen the real thing in the way of mirages—on the desert—and I know what they are and the utter folly if not absolute death in following them. He is a bull-headed but weakminded man and has been following mirages ever since some sympathetic voters were carried away by his glib talk—silly and foolish promises—and elected him to office. I do hope you in California will not send back to the Senate that rattle-brained old man—Mack-a-doodle, who never did anything worth bragging about. Never could, never will, but has an ungodly aching to stay at the public feed trough. There, I have that off'n my mind and feel the heat less.

In my time there was no citrus grown in the valley or county, unless there may have been a few trees in the garden at the Camulos Ranch. The first citrus, at least commercially, was the 2 or 3 five or ten acre tracts under the "big ditch" that Blanchard and Bradley set out somewhere along about 1875.



In my years at Santa Barbara I well knew Col. Hollister, Elwood Cooper and all of the leading farmers of the country. In 1872 or so Mr. Cooper set out some ten acres in olives, but citrus was not considered. At the Dos Pueblos Ranch (The Den Place) some ten or fifteen miles up the coast from the Cooper place, there was a small tract of lemons under irrigation that each year for many years took high prize at the State Fair at Sacramento—for beauty, size and color, but that was all. They were notoriously beautiful lemons but lacked the lemon twang and were disposed to be flatish and short of juice . . .

In my day in the valley the main crops were wheat and barley, one crop sowed and two crops volunteered. In other words sow once in three years. The first volunteer crop was good, but the second too heavy a crop to make the best head of grain. But it made good hay, and was largely baled for that purpose. Sheep or hogs were turned into the stubble after the grain was cut. Stubble usually sold for about 50c an acre and was good feeding if you had the portable fencing and the water troughs—and the teams to haul the water. Each of these items was quite important. Hogs were a very important farm crop, and I would say that grain and hogs were the farmer's mainstay. They were just getting into navy beans about 1875-1876. I am a bit hazy, but I think there was an effort at apples, cherries, figs, some few almonds, and English walnuts. All the orchard trees had a decided lean up the valley from the constant breeze from the ocean. Yes, there were peaches. At Camulos was made much peach brandy that had a very high reputation.

There were very few Californians living in the valley. In fact, the settlement in the valley was slight save at Saticoy and Santa Paula. Above Santa Paula settlement was slight, mostly along the foothills on the north side of the valley. All that was very much due to the attitude of T. Wallace More. I knew him and the family quite well at Santa Barbara. More claimed to own about all the valley from above Santa Paula to the Camulos. He would not sell and was marked against settlements—which largely caused his being filled with lead one night. He did much to retard the development of that region.

As to the ditches—the one I have sketched I knew—had water from it and helped keep it up. That is what you would call the Gries Ditch, I think. I know there was another ditch a ways up the river, but I never visited it because I had no interest in it and it was none of my business. Before in this letter I have alluded to the matter of it being quite within one's rights to, as a rule, mind his own business and not to do too much nosing around where he hain't got no business. As to that Jake Gries Ditch—we had at the house, which was built in about 1873, used the ditch. It came from the river and I often wondered the what and why of it. In my day it served no land above us, and after passing through our tract entered the Cameron place and, I think, just ran out there. It was not a very important matter even to them. So as I look back at it, it seems as though we were the only ones to make any use of it, and we did not use it for irrigation. It



was not high enough up even if we had wished to irrigate from it. The land below the ditch on our place was river bottom—sandy tract grown with a high brush that we used to call “water-mote.” I am not sure that the Cameron folks irrigated with the water. Fact is, I knew mighty little about them. Never was on the place more than once or twice—just to get some information. It was just one of those cases where we never cousined-up; no trouble in any way—just never got acquainted. We were in stock, they were not. Ordinarily that was ’nuff in that country at that time. Farmers and stock men were just a bit different—little in common.

Most of our sheep herders were what we called Indians in distinction from Greasers. We denominated most of those Indians Sonorians, from Sonora, Mexico—either directly themselves or their immediate ancestors . . .

I am very glad to have met you, and hope to further serve you if and when possible.

Most sincerely yours,

W. J. Sanborn—An old cowboy, an old sheep herder,  
and old gun-toter.

P.S. I did not stay in the east long, but in the fall of that year went to the Great Plains—Colorado and the Black Hills. Met my old friend of war days down in Mississippi, Bill Cody, of the 7th Kansas, who in July '64 was made a spy. When at last we bade each other a very affectionate good-bye in his private tent—after the show in Cleveland—we had then known each other about 60 years. He died a few weeks later, the last letter he read being one from me. Wild Bill Hickok was a friend of mine, and Capt. Jack Crawford, Chief of Scouts to Custer, was my old pard. So all-in-all I have had quite a life of it . . .

October 25, 1938

Mr. dear Mr. Freeman:

Yours of the 14th noted and I do thank thee for the illustrated booklets—both county and Santa Paula. It is very hard to believe. Lordy! How I'd like to look over that country again, but quite unlikely.

Jake Gries—cornplanter, etc. You see my only interest when there was sheep and possibly something in other stock—cattle some. All I knew as to farming operations was my observations, and I was pretty good at observing and memorizing. It was but incidental to my livelihood.

Corn, beans and all such were “dropped” in planting. Small grain was broadcast by hand, but some used a little hand broadcaster on the principle of the fan that cools the motor of the car or the electric fan to cool the air of the room. A seed sack was arranged on the plan of a hopper to feed mill. It terminated in a small square or oblong opening which fitted into the top of the little box, the face of which was a small rotary distributing fan turned by hand from the back side° . . . I think someone put a larger one in the tail-end of a wagon.



It did very well. I have not thought of such things in more than half a century. But a dozen men by hand could seed quite a tract in a day.

Hand dropping of corn and all such seed was for two reasons. First, the acreage in such plantings was comparatively small alongside of the grain acreage. Neither corn or beans (white beans) were planted to any marked extent. A friend of mine about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles up the valley planted a small try-out of white navy beans with fine results and then said to be the first white beans grown there. Up to that time the bean grown was the frijole of the country, the standard food in every stock camp—sheep, cattle or what. And let me whisper, they were good standby, rib-sticking food and I wish I had some now! I do not recall as to who bought the first corn planter, but if it is said that Jake Gries did, I say so. For Jake was a leader and outstanding man in many fine things as well as hanging a few fellows for the good of the rest! . . .

By the way, in that printed matter I saw nothing as to Saticoy but just mention of some packing plant or something located there. I was under the impression that Bill—W.D.F.—Richards, one of my old friends and quite well to do, established an institution of learning of higher grade there. How was that? Bill was as queer a duck as ever waddled to a pond. Mighty fine fellow. I left about the time he went and got married so knew nothing of him after that.

I dare say few there now talk Spanish, but in my day all who knocked about the country simply had to. I used to talk it like a native, but now recall but an occasional expression and a few words—could not carry on any conversation in that language. I have a sort of glimmering that when I went into that country the village, and it was hardly that, was “now called Santa Paula” but have no distinct recollection as to what its former name was, but it does rather sound that way—Boulderville—or some other ‘ville.”

Grain stubble, if the ranges were getting short from a dry season or over feeding, was worth money. The average price was about 50c per acre. The stubble from the first volunteer crop was considered best—the grain on the ground from rattling out in handling and cutting. Stubble was generally taken by sheep men—occasionally by cattle men. I will try and make you a sketch of the portable fence that was then generally used; you will see the sections locked together. Such fencing was thoroughly substantial, and was more resisting than a poor, cheap fence made of posts. The object of the portable fence was not to fence in the field but to fence in the stock within a small area and so oblige them to walk over and over the ground, grind up the stubble, and root and mix it into the soil to the betterment of soil conditions along with the animal excretions, all worked with the sharp hoofs of the sheep as if ground together. In the meantime the sheep foraged on the straw of the stubble and picked up the grains of barley scattered on the ground. Excellent fattening forage. As to the size of the area fenced in there were considerations. How near you were and amount of help you had and amount of fencing, etc., and the





Blanchard and Bradley's orange  
orchard as it looked in 1882

time you had in which to range the stubble, for you could not range it after the rains started. You must fence in enough area so that the number of sheep had plenty to get over and not crowd . . . Using such fencing made the feeding of that stubble a progressive matter, little by little going over the entire 40-80-160 acres.

Then there must be considered the matter of water and troughs and hauling water to the stock—some item. Portable fence might enclose  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre or less land or it might enclose many acres. The more sheep or hogs you had in the enclosure and not overcrowd—the more frequently you had to move but the more thoroughly you got all the good there was that you had paid for on the one hand and the better condition you left the land in on the other. Not infrequently after sheep had been over a trace, hogs were turned in to follow up and get it all. Even in that early day hawks were getting to be a very profitable farm item. Used to drive to Ventura and sold (I think for the San Francisco market.) I am not dead sure on that point as I never had any material interest in hogs, but they were used to follow up after the sheep if the farm owner had any hogs.

I seem to have a bit of hard work locating the stage stations on the route up the valley. In those days the stage via the Conejo swung from Saticoy down the slight hill and over the Santa Clara River and



headed for Los Angeles via Newbury Park. I used to know both Prof. Newbury and his wife when they lived in Santa Barbara and he was a teacher in the Santa Barbara College along about 1873 or so. There was a stage station almost or quite in sight of Saticoy—across the river just beyond what we called Punta de la Loma or where the hills south of the Santa Clara River fell off into the valley, and where those Italians or Spaniards had a large sheep ranch of which I spoke in my first letter. The stage station was just beyond their place. I find trouble in locating the stations up the valley, yet I have been over that road many times. All I can say is that there was—must have been—a stage station in there close by or near Jake's place . . .

You do not now have any trouble with panthers, (mountain lions) but we used to have some. I was chased one night by a big fellow and he mighty close to had me. He crossed the mouth of one of the canyons just after I had ridden in going to our sheep camp well up the canyon. Well, I had a helluva time for a spell.

I wonder if the Wiley boys are still recalled. Seems to me that is the name—once ran one of the two stores at Santa Paula and in which was the post office. Byron was a queer duck. Good fellow, but he had his views of things, and at times folks luffed at Byron and his queer notions.

Politics? Yes, I am a Republican and an American of the untoddy kind. We lost our two boys in the World War—one of mine and one of the Mrs., but they grew up together. My son was the 5th generation of this family to stand on the battle line—beginning with the Indian wars in New Hampshire. I had an ancestor with Wolfe at Quebec, another and more in the Revolution—then another in the War of 1812—another in the War with Mexico, 1846—myself and father in the Civil War—two in the World War—both gone. I have been shot, cut, drowned, froze to death (almost), dead-busted and hungry quite a number of times, yet today I am the youngest man in town for his age—past 85.

Most kindly yours,  
W. J. Sanborn

P.S. In my day when Spanish was spoken thereabouts, the inclination of those who favored the Spanish pronunciation was to call it as I used to pronounce it—Santa POWLAH—rather than as the common American pronunciation—Santa Paula, as in St. Paul.

This is Thursday evening and the letter did not get off—was not corrected or gone over. It'd rather not send it, but feel obliged to do so. If you can't make it out your postmaster probably can. You know the postmasters are supposed to be able to decipher anything outside of a straight line . . .

W. J. Sanborn

(X-shepherd, also X-dep. postmaster at Saticoy)

That winter we three in the post office shack were each and all postmasters—without pay or kompensashun. We had nothing to do and ran the P.O. that winter. FUN!



January 10, 1939

My dear Mr. Freeman:

I have been negligent in replying to your very kindly letter of December 16 . . .

I am not sure and wonder if I mentioned to you that Colonel Edward N. Wentworth of the Armour Company at Chicago, who was to blame for the first item of mine in the Los Angeles stock journal, is a very special friend of mine and is now writing a book on the history of sheep in the United States, or something of the sort. I have written to Colonel Ed., as we know him here, (his aged mother is our next door neighbor and closest friend) concerning the possibility of your having information in that region that might interest him. He occasionally goes to the Pacific coast attending major stock growers gatherings, and it might be possible that he would drop in upon you some day. Mighty fine fellow and I know you'd be glad to meet him and prize the acquaintance . . .

I wonder if you ever read my yarn, "A Sweet Taste" which was published in the stockgrowers magazine at Fort Worth a couple years ago. If not and you wish to read it will see if I have a copy left. Attracted a good deal of attention from cattlemen. Old Jimmy Palmtree figured in it. I wonder if any of the olders there have any recollection of old Jimmy Palmtree, who was for years a sort of right hand man to E. B. Higgins of Saticoy . . .

Been laid up with a cold and find that after more than 85 years I do not seem to have the ability I yuster-have to get from under such matters.

Very sincerely,

W. J. Sanborn—Oldtime cowboy, Plainsman, gun-toter and now just an old man and nothing more.

January 30, '39

Dear Mr. Freeman:

Yours duly noted. Col. Wentworth is somewhere in the far west even now. If he reaches So. California he will see and get acquainted with you. If he does not this trip reach yelling distance, he is going to write you to see if he can pick up some more sheep information for the book he is working out<sup>10</sup> He is out there somewhere with his wife and dog and his Packard—his usual manner of traveling.

In my day in your country we had a few wild animals occasionally getting reasonably into touch with civilization. We once had some sheep lambing in a canyon just north from Saticoy. Going to that camp late one P.M., in fact early evening, getting dark, I had an encounter with a—what we then called a California lion and it was rather unpleasant. Was hair-raising but no blod spilt.

At another time coming into the valley from the Tehachipi country—in fact from the Beal Ranch—when practically in sight of Santa Paula coming down the mountain not far from where that bright red cinnabar outcropping used to show—and going down the trail into



the valley, I encountered a fine, very healthy she grizzly with some four or five pups. Quite a yarn, but she decided I was too close to the cubs and took after me down the trail. My horse, Domingus, and I with the old gal went down that trail like hell a beatin tanbark. At times on retreat I have been quite successful, as I was that evening after sundown. But Domingus, just at a critical moment, stepped on a stone that turned or sprained her rear ankle, and went in on three legs. We hobbled into Jimmie's that night about nine or ten in the evening. A week's rest and Domingus was himself again. But them days is gone forever in that country.

Sincerely, W. J. Sanborn

Mount Dora, Florida

October 22, 1940

Mr. Dear Sir:

Occasionally in this world there's a turn-about and here is one. You used to ask me for information in old time matters thereabouts, and now I am going to turn the game just a bit. What's ALFALFA TEA? What's *supposed* to be good for? What *is it* good for?

Here is the reason for asking: A while ago my attention was called to an advertisement—"Drink Alfalfa Tea!" It was just a line in a scrap of paper I picked off the floor in an office where I was waiting for a friend. It stood out in large letters. After awhile it began to come back to me, Alfalfa Tea, Alfalfa Tea. I told myself about how I saw the first alfalfa grown in southern California and how I had written you about it. Making tea of it now I am not so sure—but there might be something in it. It was mighty good feed for lambs—it is good hay—might be something in it as a drink . . . So I ask thee, I know you'll be glad to advise me. Perhaps tell me how the alfalfa is used as a tea—where I can get some to try—possibly send me a bunch of alfalfa by post and I make my own tea . . .

This is more just a matter of information to me for I am in no special need of anything of the sort. Am now past my 87th birthday—well and hearty—active every day—sleep well each night—eat well two or three times a day—and slowly sliding down the sunny side of the hill toward the boat landing for the other side. No great amount of care—and in the immediate interim using what influence I may have toward the granting of an extended and interminable vacation to Eleanor of the White House . . .

In a right neighborly way

Very Sincerely,

W. J. Sanborn

#### NOTES

1. The foregoing was originally part of a letter from Colonel Sanborn to his friend, Colonel Edward N. Wentworth. Wentworth passed it on to the editor of *Western Livestock Journal*, and it was published in that magazine in the issue of April 12, 1938.



2. The Jake Gries property was west of what is now Steckel Drive and south of Highway 126.

3. Mr. George G. Sewell owned the property between Cemetery and Middle roads, north of West Main Street.

4. Technically, the More murder is still unsolved. Sanborn's suggestion that Charlie Higgins might have been involved is most interesting inasmuch as his name has never before been linked with the crime.

5. It is difficult to see how Blanchard and Bradley could have been selling oil from the holdings of the Philadelphia company represented by Thomas R. Bard. Sanborn is probably confused on this point, not surprising in view of the fact he is recalling events from some sixty years back.

6. A Yankee corruption of the Spanish zanja?

7. The Colonel obviously has his "great sort of God-Almighty chaps" confused. Thomas R. Bard was the gentleman sent out by the Philadelphia group to develop the oil in this area. Members of the Bard family are positive that Mr. Bard did not possess such a dogcart as Sanborn describes. Possibly Mr. Richards of Saticoy did. Sanborn is also incorrect in stating that no oil was developed under Bard. The first oil well in the state to produce commercially was brought in by Mr. Bard in the Sisar Creek region and produced for many years.

8. Blanchard's sheep dip was located in the vicinity of the present Glen City School.

9. This method is still in use.

10. *America's Sheep Trails/History-Personalities*. Edward Norris Wentworth. The Iowa State College Press, Ames, Iowa, 1948. Also *Shepherd's Empire*—Charles Wayland Towne and Edward Norris Wentworth, University of Oklahoma Press, 1945.



# Holy Joe, Santa Paula Prophet

Edited from the Santa Paula *Graphic*

Every community has at least one individual that sooner or later acquires the reputation of being a "character." In the case of Santa Paula the character appears to have arrived before the town and to have left within a few years of the time Nathan W. Blanchard laid out the townsite. The only name by which we know this worthy today is the self-bestowed sobriquet of "Holy Joe." There is one vague reference to a "Holy Joe" Price in a manuscript at the Pioneer Museum, and this may have been our hero's true surname. In fact, if it had not been for "Doc" Guiberson, who often wrote for the newspapers under the name of "Marcus One," and J. M. Scanland, editor of the Santa Paula *Graphic*, Joseph would long since have passed into oblivion. The very first issue of the *Graphic*, published in April, 1887, carried a story by "Marcus One" on Holy Joe. Here is what Guiberson tells:

"Twas on the day after Christmas, 1871, that I 'hoofed it,' for the first time from Ventura to the Sespe, with three 10-cent pieces in my pocket, and an unlimited supply of enterprise, in search of government land, and more particularly, just at that time, to get a square meal for the cash I had. It was about mid-day when I came in sight of a rude cabin, and being hungry and tired I called a halt, knocked at the door of the house, and was bid 'come in.' In I went, and there stood a man about forty-five years of age, gray hair, heavy eyelashes and a strong musical voice, which bade me welcome by stating that if I would partake of his kind of food he would fry some bacon and make a cup of coffee. Without further ceremony I was invited to be seated on a box, after which I patiently waited for the bacon and coffee.

"Finally, I was invited to draw my box up to the table, and just as I was beginning to eat, me host said: 'Stranger, I always ask a blessing before I eat, and not being acquainted with you will ask it without extending the invitation to you.' I immediately assumed the proper reverential position, when the man threw his head back, shut his eyes, and in a clear evangelical key began to ask the Lord to bless the traveler that had joined him in the needed repast, his voice gradually ascending in the scale until it finally reached that harsh, shrill climax, catching his breath only when the sentence rounded up with a 'ah-ah'.

"After a fervent petition calling down blessings upon all to the ends of the earth and repeating the Lord's Prayer by interlarding it with western lore, he finally exclaimed, 'Ah-men-ah!' After passing the plate of 'corn-dodgers' he said:

"'Stranger, my profession is that of a Baptist minister. I settled here in 1868 and have been raising corn and hogs; I manage to keep alive by selling corn and bacon during the week and on the Sabbath I preach to the poor-hearted people up the valley, and occasionally to the well-to-do ones. I built this house myself, and own this tract of 20 acres; my name is Holy Joe! I am from Umatilla, Oregon, and a





An early Main Street scene in Santa Paula. The building in the background was probably the first commercial building in the town. The site is presently occupied by McMahan's Furniture Store.

hard shell Baptist preacher. To be frank with you stranger, this is too dry a country for my church! It may do for Catholics and Indians, but it is too dry for an old iron-side Baptist.'

"'Yes!' continued Holy Joe, 'I'm going back to Oregon, not because I can't make a livin' here, or that this is not a good country; and, by the way stranger, just keep your seat and let me tell you what is going to happen in this section in the next ten years. Should you live in these parts you will then behold a mighty change. Where the sage brush and cactus flourishes, and the coyotes and road runners abound, where the wild mustard is monarch of the rich mesas, and the Spanish broncho and the borega are the only inhabitants, you will behold spring forth as if by magic, a civilization and an industry not yet dreamed of by the most sanguine. This sage brush and cactus land will be dotted with beautiful houses, verdure, flowers, and groves of evergreens. Down this rocky canyon, where dwells naught but the grizzly and the coyote, ere ten years have passed, the exhilarating breeze from Topa-Topa will be wafted along laden with the ambrosial sweetness of orange flowers and redolent with floral odors from the crowded lawns and gardens along the murmuring Mupu. And right here, on this brushy mesa will spring forth a town with unusual vigor and enterprise. These lands covered with mustard and sage brush will be orange orchards



and alfalfa fields. This tract, which cost me \$5 an acre, will be worth as many hundreds per acre; the ring of the school bell and the whistle of the locomotive will tell of an advancement not dreamed of now,' concluded the prophetic Joseph.

"After partaking of Holy Joe's sumptuous repast, I marched up the valley, following the public road. There was not a human habitation in view until I reached the Sespe, where now flourishes the thriving village of Bardsdale. The rude cabin of Holy Joe constituted the only 'settlement' within several miles. There yet remains a portion of Holy Joe's cabin in the dwelling house of Mr. L. P. Snuffin of our town."

It must be admitted that Doc Guiberson and Holy Joe told a good story, although one suspects that there are some embellishments that will not stand too much scrutiny. The Snuffin house referred to was in the general area of the present Universalist Church, but it is doubtful if Holy Joe built the structure. Jefferson Crane is usually given the credit for its construction as he stated in his recorded memoirs: "Ignoring the present corporate limits of the town, the first house built was by Alexander Gray. Taking the corporate limits into consideration the house that George G. Sewell so long lived in was the first, as it was the first built in the valley after the subdivision of the ranch. A man by the name of Johnson bought the lot east of Gray and built near the present pumping plant. The two Parson brothers bought the next ten acres and built a small house. I built the next one in March, 1867, and it was long known as the Snuffin house." Possibly the mustard was so high Guiberson only saw Holy Joe's cabin!

It would be interesting to know who the well-to-do settlers were that Joseph preached to on occasions. Certainly not the del Valle of the Camulos, where a 'hard-shell Baptist preacher' would be about as welcome as an east wind during a drought. The only other person that the reference might apply to was T. W. More of the Sespe; and, interestingly enough, it was a former Baptist minister, Frank Sprague, that was later convicted and sentenced to hang for the murder of More.

Holy Joe's comments on the dryness of the country undoubtedly refer to climatic conditions rather than to any lack of potables. True, Billy Gordon had not as yet built his Sixteen Mile Saloon, but the climate in Santa Paula would be a bit dry for one used to Oregon winters. In any event, Joseph seems to have left for parts unknown about 1875.

The void left behind when Holy Joe departed from Santa Paula (or Boulderville as it was known before Mr. Blanchard laid out the town,) was not the kind of vacuum that could long endure. There are always others able and willing to blow out the tempting notes from the booster's horn of the chamber of commerce. Newspaper editors have a natural affinity for this type of music, and Editor Scanland of the *Graphic* was no exception. In his first issue Scanland, in commenting on Holy Joe's prophecies, stated:

"The predictions of 'Holy Joe' were neither visionary or overdrawn. In fact, he only caught a slight vision of the bright future of



this section. Were that good pioneer preacher here today, (1887) he could as correctly predict that in five years where now thrives our village, will be a young metropolis. It will be but a short time when the oil interests of this locality shall have assumed that magnitude which will require a cordon of fifty-thousand barrel oil tanks, from the one now being built up the Santa Clara Canyon to the Pump Station, to store the productions of the numerous oil wells.

"It is more than likely that a competing railroad will enter our town from Los Angeles, pass up the Santa Paula valley to the world renowned sanitarium—that Hygienic vale of the Ojai, then to Santa Barbara. Yes, in less than half a dozen years a hundred thousand dollar courthouse will be added to the numerous stately structures, and then will be heard the newsboys as they hurry through the crowded streets: 'Here's yer *Daily Graphic*, only five cents a copy!'"

Truly, these early newspaper editors were a remarkable breed. For years they, along with every other pioneer in the region, had been hoping, praying, and even begging for the railroads to build into their midst. The day before Scanland published the first issue of the *Graphic* the Southern Pacific had reached Ventura with their rails, and yet in this first issue Scanland is already day dreaming of the time when some mythical rival road would follow to offer competition!

Of the two men, Holy Joe must be rated a far better prophet than Scanland. There is nothing in his verbose predictions that did not come true, albeit somewhat more than ten years were required to fulfill them. Scanland on the other hand, foresaw a competing railroad, something that never materialized. He pictured a magnificent courthouse within five years, whereas in reality the town did not have a city hall until 1958. As a matter of fact, Scanland never even saw the day that his *Graphic* was a daily newspaper. He sold the paper after a short period of time to Dr. Stephen Bowers, who changed the name to the *Golden State*. Some three months later C. J. McDivitt bought out Bowers and once again changed the name, this time to the *Santa Paula Chronicle*.



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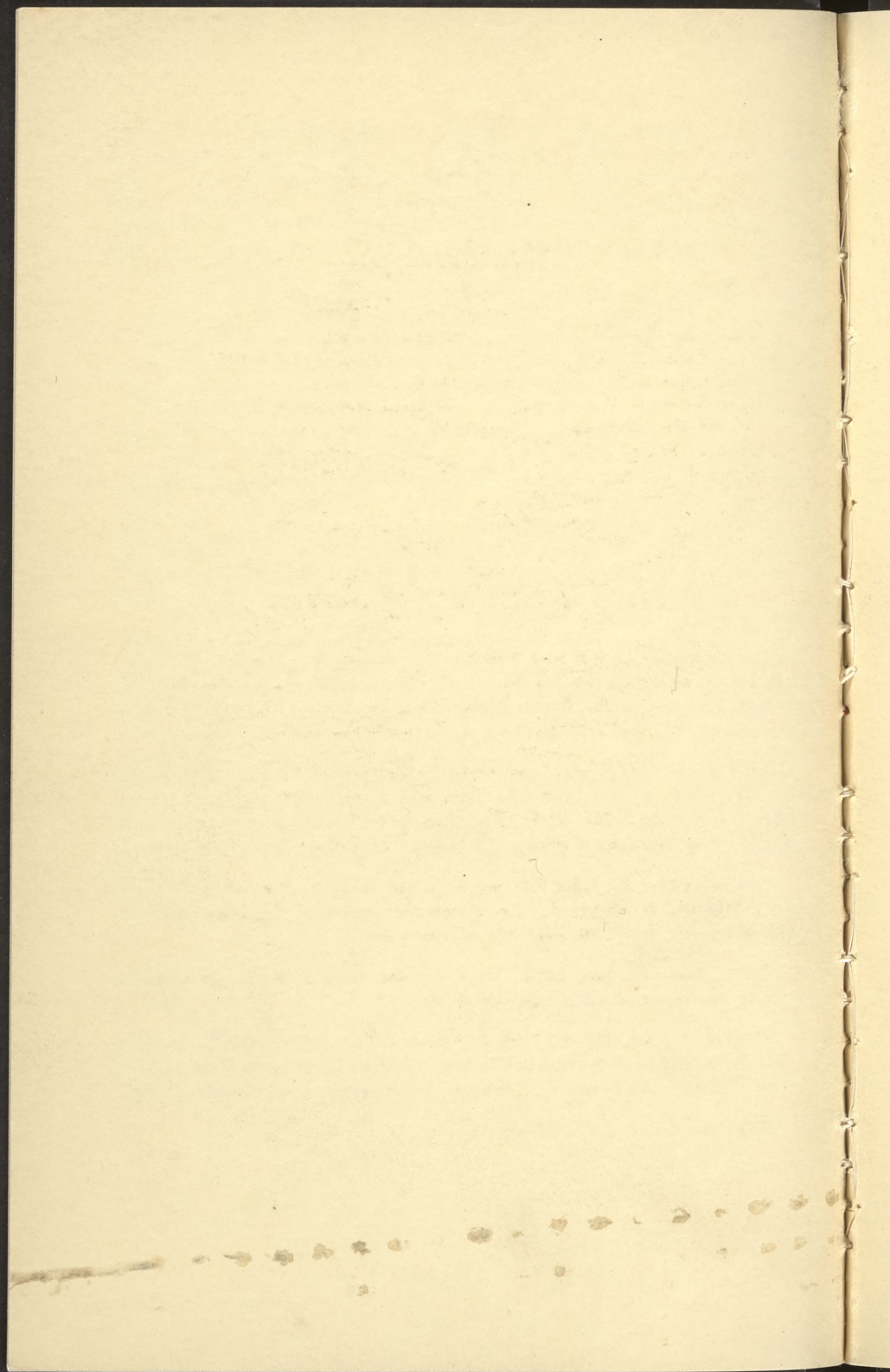
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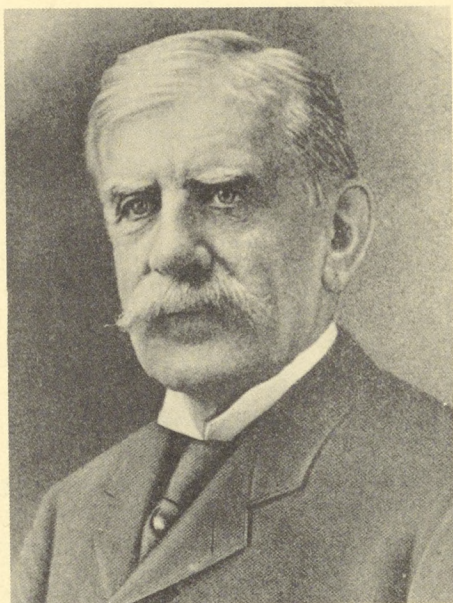
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HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
*QUARTERLY*



THOMAS R. BARD

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## *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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# The Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly

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FEBRUARY, 1960

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## Thomas R. Bard

There have been few issues of the *Quarterly* in which the name of Thomas R. Bard does not appear on at least one occasion. The reason for this is simple: Mr. Bard's many and diverse activities in Ventura County between 1865 and 1915 are so inexorably interwoven in the county's history that few topics can be written upon without reference to him. A man with the record of public service such as his is certainly deserving of a full book-length biography, and we have been under the impression for some time that this was in the process of preparation. However, in lieu of its appearance we are presenting herewith a full issue devoted to Mr. Bard.

Recently, members of the Bard family built and dedicated a Memorial to Thomas R. and Mary Bard on the old family homesite at Berylwood, Hueneme. Fergus L. Fairbanks was the principal speaker on that occasion, and we are publishing his address in full. Mr. Fairbanks probably knew Thomas R. Bard better than any man now living, is possessed of a remarkable memory to recall many unrecorded events associated with him, and the ability to put them in readable form. The all too brief remarks of Miss Sarah Blanchard on the same occasion are also included.

To round out this issue on Thomas R. Bard, we have selected the fascinating story of his election to the United States Senate in 1900. Few people in Ventura County today have read the full account of this remarkable struggle that lasted for a year and which deprived the State of California of its full representation in the Senate for that period. The story as printed here is taken from the thesis of Miss Amy Eleanor Smith of Fillmore. It was written in 1933 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts. A generation accustomed to the direct vote for United States Senator will find it most intriguing.



## Thomas R. Bard

Address of Fergus L. Fairbanks at the Dedication of the  
Bard Memorial, November 21, 1959

I suppose I have been asked to speak today mainly because I am one of the few persons still living who have known Thomas R. Bard, and have worked with him and for him during part of his lifetime.

It would be impossible in the brief time at my disposal to even touch on the high points of the life of this man, who still stands as Ventura County's most distinguished citizen, covering as it does the time from 1865 to 1915, a period of fifty years.

He was born in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, on December 8, 1841, descended of a line of able and worthy men who had been citizens of this old Commonwealth. He was only ten years old when his father died, but as was said by one of those who wrote a brief history of his life and career, "he developed in his early years the resourcefulness and strength of character which distinguished him all his life."

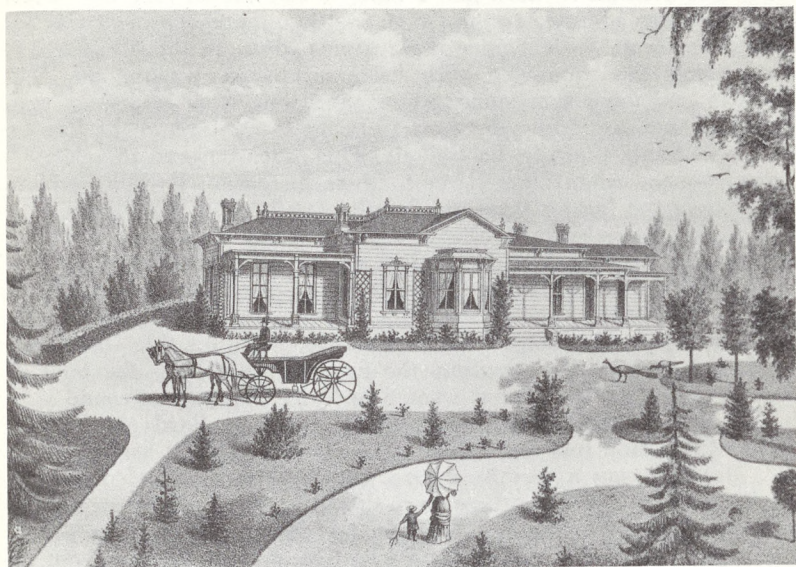
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When he was about twenty, he came under the observation of Thomas A. Scott, President of Lincoln's Cabinet, and who had charge of the railroads during the Civil War. Scott had this young man under his eye for several years, and during the period gave young Bard many difficult things to do: scouting, keeping track of trains, and like jobs. He saw that he had here a young man of great ability and who used discretion in carrying out orders, so that at the close of the war he gave Bard work that was to test his mettle.

In 1859, just 100 years ago, oil was discovered in Pennsylvania, and Scott, appreciating what that would mean to the railroads as well as to other industries, started to acquire oil bearing lands in that state, also looking westward to California, where geologists had found vast oil seepages. Particularly was that true in Ventura County. Accompanied by John P. Green, attorney for the Pennsylvania Railroad and later vice-president of the road, Scott came to California and started to acquire oil-bearing lands. In this county and Los Angeles County he bought 277,000 acres, all part of old Spanish and Mexican grants. Nearly all of these grants were made after Secularization took most of the land away from the Missions. Practically none of these grants was made for less than two square leagues (about 8300 acres). Most of them were for much more.

The machinery Bard was to use was sent around the Horn by boat and took a long time to arrive. When it did arrive it was Bard's job to put it to work.

In every history written about Ventura County you find the name of Bard over and over. In order to give a stranger an accurate picture of Thomas R. Bard you would have to picture the county as it was in 1865, and in each subsequent year during his lifetime, as he was a leader in almost all of the county's early growth. When he arrived the land was unbroken. It was cattle country. Later it was a sheep country,





Residence of Thomas R. Bard, Hueneme, 1883

and Bard with various partners, David T. Perkins, A. W. Browne, A. B. Smith, and various others, owned thousands of head of sheep. With the dry years of the late 70's they lost most of their flocks. Lambs were killed as soon as they were born, in an attempt to try to save the mothers. It was a desperate time for a man to stay solvent, and only the ablest and hardiest remained in business.

History records that the first barley was planted in the county by two of the Borchard family. Their descendants are still with us. Barley as a crop was followed by the lima bean, and about 1900 the sugar beet came to reduce the barley crop and the bean crop. To one like myself who has ridden a horse through a forest of mustard, towering far above his head, it seemed impossible that this county should prove to be one of the biggest producers of barley, that it should furnish three-fourths of the lima beans grown in the United States, or that it could produce beets of a sugar content the highest in the world.

Later came the apricot and other deciduous fruits, and then the orange and the lemon. In 1900 when I was working for the Bank of Hueneme, the only lemon orchard on the south side of the river was owned by Thomas Bell, a former supervisor, on Cooper Road. Now hundreds of acres are given over to their cultivation. From Saticoy westward and in the Ojai Valley the orange is seen mile after mile. In



all of this Thomas R. Bard had a part. It was not an easy life. When California was admitted to the Union in 1850, the government was obligated by treaty to recognize these grants given to the Mexicans. A commission was appointed with headquarters in Washington, D.C. The two ranchos in this county whose titles were most in dispute were Rancho Sespe, extending eastward from Santa Paula, and the Rancho El Rio de Santa Clara O' La Colonia. This ranch covered some 48,000 acres from the Santa Clara River south to the ocean. T. Wallace More had bought the former from the Carrillo family, and Bard bought the latter from the soldiers to whom it was allotted, purchased for Scott who sold it later to Bard. Time does not permit me to enter into the intricacies of either of them. Suffice it to say that More lost his life in defending his title. While Bard's life was threatened on various occasions, he was never shot at by the squatters. After his title was finally confirmed he gave the squatters the first chance to buy the land. If they did not wish to buy but wanted to farm the land, he would lease it. The last of the squatters was dispossessed by Bard about 1869. Some of this land sold for as little as \$5.00 or \$6.00 per acre.

Mr. Bard was a very busy man. He was often so loaded up with work—work that two or three men should have been doing—that he was too absorbed to notice trivialities. At Berylwood there were two hitching racks at which horses could be tied, one on the east front for Mr. Bard's horse or horses, the other on the north side for the horses of visitors. He was known on occasion to leave the house and drive off with a horse and buggy that was on the east front by mistake. He had excellent horses and shortly found out that he had the wrong conveyance. On one occasion that Mrs. Bard laughed over, when her husband had forgotten some one she felt he should have known, she remarked, "Thomas, I do believe that if I went away for three months, that when I returned you would say, 'Let's see, haven't I met you somewhere before?'" With all he had on his mind, I wonder that he could remember anyone.

Although I was Cashier of the Bank of Hueneme for six years after 1900 and he was president, his visits were short and to the point. However, after he returned following the close of his term in the United States Senate his team ran away and one of his legs was broken. While the leg was in a cast and he could do nothing except sit out in the beautiful gardens at Berylwood, I found out that he had more time to recount the past. At that time he told me about what promised at the time to be his most dangerous experience. The mustard in the valley was so high that a man could stand up in a wagon or buggy and not come anywhere near seeing over their tops. As he drove through this mustard forest, he saw men on horseback lined up in front, some on the right and some on the left, but all facing inward. To pass he would have to drive between them. He cracked the whip, put the lines between his knees, and with a cocked revolver in each hand went by on the dead run.



Mrs. Ketura Old, who with her husband was one of the first settlers in the Ocean View District, told me a long time ago that when they first settled on the land they bought they were forced to put up a long pole with a white rag on the end in order to be able to find their way back from the beach, three miles distant. I have seen mustard ten feet high within 200 yards of the old schoolhouse on Broad Street, when I was a small boy and going to school there.

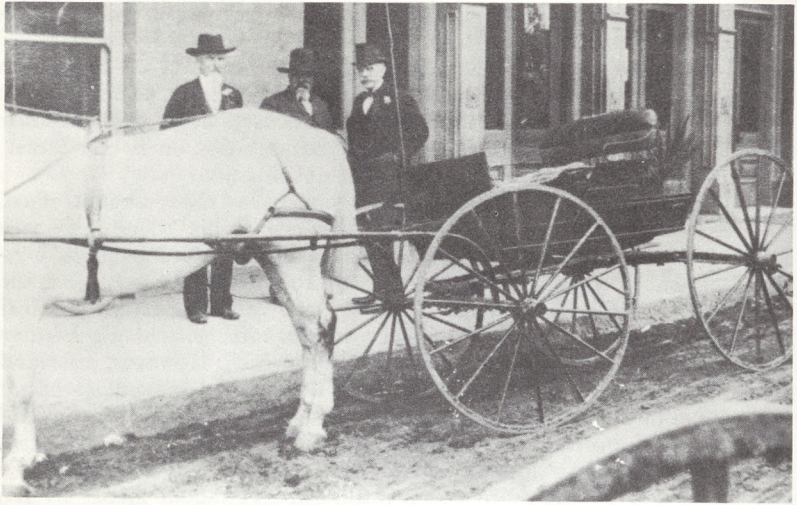
Mr. Bard's political life is a long chapter. He never sought office, but was often forced into office by the urgency of his friends. He was an early supervisor, first in Santa Barbara County, and later in Ventura County. Whenever possible he tried to unload the office on his close friend, David T. Perkins. For an extensive study of his political life there are many sources to which you can turn. Sheridan's *History of Ventura County* is good. Sheridan knew him well. However, Sheridan refers to Bard as a "king-maker." Bard never tried to control either state or county politics, so I feel that the name is a misnomer. I recall well the year-long campaign after Stephen M. White's senatorial term was finished. At that time United States Senators were elected by the legislature. For a year there was a deadlock, terminated finally by the election of Mr. Bard. At that time the San Francisco papers were full of the story. Reporters flocked to Hueneme, and if they got no news they made some up. They hung around Berylwood, along with office-seekers, until Mr. Bard had to send them away at midnight.

I suppose every boy has his idol. Thomas R. Bard was mine. My father took charge of the wharf and warehouses in Hueneme in April, 1881, when I was five years old. Berylwood was almost the only place in the valley where fruit was grown. There were acres of apricot trees, a great many peach trees, and quantities of blackberries. My Aunt Annie, who lived with us at that time, helped Mrs. Bard with her sewing for the children and Mrs. Bard suggested to her that she find out from my mother if we would like to come out and pick some blackberries. We would, of course, and I was taken along by my mother. I suppose I was probably eight years old. Mr. Bard came to get us, and I remember that he was smoking a very large cigar, which he threw away, saying he must not set a bad example to a small boy. As I grew up, Gus Barkley, who looked after the orchard, gave me odd jobs to do during the fruit season. I remember that when I was 12 years of age Mr. Bard had a fruit dryer to care for the apricots. It was run by steam, very similar to one that R. G. Surdam had installed on Poli Street in Ventura. There were several such installed by Surdam until the growers discovered that the sun was better than any steam plant. I was allowed to pit fruit. I think I made \$1.20 my best day.

Mr. Bard's brother-in-law, Otto Gerberding, was also his secretary, and he occasionally gave me errands to do.

After his family, Mr. Bard's first care was for the Presbyterian Sunday School, of which he had been the superintendent for many years. When he went to Washington as Senator he asked me to take charge of the Sunday School, and from time to time would write me





Dr. Cephas L. Bard, L. F. (Baldy) Eastin, and Thomas R. Bard posed on Main Street, Ventura, 1896

from there making certain suggestions. He owned a bus which was used on Sundays to take his own and the neighbor's children to Sunday School. He bought, or had his daughter Beryl buy, very fine books to give to the children. Mr. Bard's religion was to him a very real and important thing. Before there was much of a population at Hueneme, he had given a lot for a Presbyterian Church at Ventura and contributed largely to the building. Not too long thereafter he gave a lot to the Methodist Church at Ventura; a few years later he gave the land for an Evangelical Church (which later became a Methodist Church) in Bardsdale and about the same time gave a lot for the Presbyterian Church at Hueneme. Undoubtedly he assisted in starting and supporting many other churches in Ventura County. Most of these are a matter of history. I would not expect to get any further information from the Bard family, as their motto has always been not to let the right hand know what the left hand was doing.

Mr. Blanchard and Mr. Foster were not the only men in the county who gave libraries to the people. I think it must have been about 1885 that Thomas R. Bard set aside a large room in Bard's Hall for a library and gave several thousand books, suitable for all ages, from children who had just learned to read to old people who cared only for the classics as reading matter. He not only furnished the building and gave the books, but paid the librarian for a number of years until patrons drifted away. One of my aunts was librarian for a time. About 1900, when the new schoolhouse on Fourth Street was completed and



the old Broad Street school building abandoned, Mr. Bard gave to the school district all of the books that Mr. Haydock, the then principal, cared to have in the school library.

Mr. Bard was a very reserved man, I always felt. It is hard to see how he could be with all he had gone through. I try to compare him at times with his brother, Dr. Cephas L. Bard, who was Ventura County's best story teller. Arturo Orena's drug store was just west of the old Bank of Ventura on the corner of Oak Street, Ventura, and there would gather Dr. Bard, John Stow, L. F. (Baldy) Eastin, County Clerk, and many others of what you might call "the gang." It is too bad that someone did not make a book from the stories told there, although I am afraid some of them would have needed to be expurgated. There were more babies named Cephas in Ventura County than those bearing any other name. The brothers were alike in their leadership, but different in many other ways.

Thomas R. Bard was a very generous man. Sheridan, in his *History of Ventura County*, says that Bard never foreclosed a mortgage. I am certain that was true. On one occasion while I was working for the Bank of Hueneme, Major Gregg—cashier of the bank—said to Mr. Bard that we had too much money on hand and wished we could find some loans. As many of you know Mr. Bard owned the Bardsdale Tract of the Rancho Sespe and had permitted his friend, R. G. Surdham, to subdivide it. Very few of the purchasers had much money to pay down and they gave a mortgage for the balance due. Mr. Bard replied, "I will sell you some of the Bardsdale mortgages, under one condition. You must not foreclose any of them, even though they may be slow in paying their interest. If you feel like doing that at any time, just charge the paper to my account." For eleven years I was cashier of Fillmore State Bank, and many of the Bardsdale people said to me, "If Mr. Bard had not been so good to us we could never have paid for our land."

He was especially good to old friends. John T. Stow was county surveyor in early days. He lived with his mother, who was a very dear old lady. When Stow died it developed that Thomas R. Bard was named as executor of his will. There was not much of an estate, but, like the widow's cruse of oil, it lasted as long as Mrs. Stow lived.

When the firm of Wolff and Lehman dissolved, neither partner would buy the other out. There was a big sale, among other things accounts payable. Many of them sold for a fraction of their face value. Mr. Bard had a man at the sale who bid in the accounts of most of the men whom he knew, and then permitted them to pay him for what the account brought. If they had not the cash, they were given a chance to make a note payable in installments.

Someone evidently persuaded him that I should go to college. He paid for a scholarship for me at Occidental College, good for four years if I wished, although I did not know at the time whence it came. Old friends were constantly borrowing from him, and even when he knew it would never be repaid it was not denied them. These few instances could be extended indefinitely.



He made many warm friends in the Senate. Senators Spooner and Quarles of Wisconsin, Senator Platt of Connecticut, and others of that type felt honored by his friendship. Some of them were visitors at Berylwood. He was made Chairman of the Committee for Indian Affairs at an early date. Had he been allowed to have a commissioner appointed of his choice, the stench arising from the treatment of Indian wards of the government would have been ended long before it was. His work in behalf of the Panama Canal was notable. He opposed the admission of Arizona and New Mexico as one state, and for a long time was bitterly abused in most of the newspapers in those two territories—now states. Many say that this opposition had much to do with his defeat for re-election. Be that as it may, I know that the Senator would not make peace with the Southern Pacific Railroad, and as they were back in power they turned thumbs down on his election. The Republican convention that was to nominate Bard's successor met at Santa Cruz in the summer of 1904. I was not a delegate, but at the request of some of Bard's friends I was present—for just one purpose. It was a foregone conclusion that Frank P. Flint would be nominated. Senator Robert Bulla was one of those who had been balloted for, but he was a loyal friend of Senator Bard. At his request I went to the room in the Sea Beach Hotel occupied by Walter F. X. Parker, the railroad boss, J. O. (Black) Hayes, and Gen. George Stone, to ask a favor of Bulla. I was sure Mr. Bard would not like it, but on the other hand Bulla was a very close friend of his. I was glad to get out quickly. The state that day rejected one of the ablest, most honest and most valuable senators ever to sit in the Halls of Congress.

Senator Bard lived about ten years after his retirement from the Senate, and resumed his many duties, but at a gradually slower pace. He had disposed of most of his oil interests some seven or eight years before, and his land holdings were being managed by capable men.

Much of the money derived from his sale of Union Oil he had invested with his old friend, Milo M. Potter, in the Potter Hotel at Santa Barbara. With him in this investment went his old friend, David T. Perkins.

Miss Sarah Blanchard is to talk about Mrs. Mary B. Bard today, but I cannot end without paying tribute to her. She was one of the easiest people to meet and talk to that I ever knew. She was a daughter of Christian Otto Gerberding, who was at the time of her marriage to Mr. Bard, the editor of the San Francisco *Bulletin*. We have one thing to remember him for that will, I hope, last many years. He gave away acorns from cork oaks, about 1880, I think, and some of the trees thus given are enormous trees. The one on the old Mat Atmore place near Fillmore is one of the largest in the state.

It is a pleasure to me to be here today, and pay my small tribute to the Bard family. There has never been a stain on the family record, but they were always an honor to their county, state and nation.



## Mary Gerberding Bard

Remarks of Miss Sarah Blanchard at Thomas R. Bard  
Memorial Ceremonies, November 21, 1959

Mrs. Bard was a being of such wide sympathies and tastes that it is hard to say in a few words anything that is at all descriptive. To the older residents of Ventura County, Hueneme means the Bard Family.

There was the great garden with its avenues of stately trees and in their garden were many rare plants found nowhere else; for in those early days there was no prohibition against bringing in seeds and plants and Mr. Bard was in correspondence with botanists all over the world. In this garden too were especially sheltered spots where we had tea and where we sat while Mrs. Bard read aloud—and no one ever read aloud as she did! She became actually the characters in the book and her listeners sometimes looked up from their hemstitching or feather stitching or whatever stitching was then in vogue at the time, thinking she had stopped reading and was talking.

She was a natural mimic and could tell a dialect story to perfection. Here was such a busy life—so many friends—so many interests and always a helping hand wherever hers was needed, no matter how far removed the need might be from her own life and interests.

But there was not always the beautiful garden with its great trees and pleasure spots and I imagine when Mrs. Bard came down from San Francisco as a bride, it may have been something of a desolate waste.

Mr. Bard met his future bride at a family wedding and fell in love with her. She was then sixteen and her mother, Mrs. Gerberding, consented to her engagement, but the wedding could not take place until her daughter was eighteen. In the meantime her little Mary was being brought up to be a good and obedient child.

For their wedding trip they went abroad—a great event at that time—stopping enroute to visit Mr. Bard's family. On the way to their visit, Mary said anxiously to her husband, "Thomas, do you think your mother will let me have coffee when we visit her?" This was something her own mother had not allowed and to be permitted to drink coffee was a symbol of being grown up.

Mr. Bard had promised her when they were married that she could go up to San Francisco to see her class graduate and on that occasion she would see all her friends, hear what had happened to each one and what were the plans of each for the future. But Mrs. Bard said, what was one of the greatest disappointments of her life came as a result of this promise. The only way to make this trip was by one of the little coastal ships, probably a "side-wheeler," that plied up and down the coast, putting into each harbor when weather permitted. Finally the





Mary Gerberding Bard

day, The Great Day, anticipated for a year arrived. At seven o'clock in the morning she was sitting in a rocking chair dressed for the trip, with the baby on a pillow on her lap and beside her a bag packed with the baby's most immediate necessities. Hour after hour they all waited and at seven o'clock in the evening the ship blew its whistle and went by—it was too rough to put in at Port Hueneme.



# The Election of Thomas R. Bard to the United States Senate

By AMY ELEANOR SMITH

In 1899 as the term of United States Senator Stephen Mallory White of California drew to a close, agitation arose concerning the election of his successor. White, a Democrat, had been particularly successful during his term in the Senate, but the Republican party was again in the ascendancy in the California legislature, and party feeling was strong.

There were many Republican factions and interests, each of which brought forth a candidate. The man seeming to have the strongest possibilities was Daniel Burns, a mining engineer with interests in Mexico and a former lieutenant-governor of California. He was backed by the Southern Pacific Railroad, which for years had been an influence in politics and usually elected its man.

On January 10, 1899 when the subject of the nomination of a United States Senator came before the respective houses of the legislature, the following men were placed in nomination by the state senators: Robert Bulla, W. H. L. Barnes, Ulysses S. Grant, Jr., George A. Knight, Thomas R. Bard, Daniel Burns, Stephen M. White, and Irving M. Scott. The Assembly nominated the following: Daniel Burns, Ulysses S. Grant, Jr., Robert Bulla, Stephen M. White, George A. Knight, W. H. L. Barnes, and M. M. Estee. The voting resulted in no choice for Senator in either house, though the incumbent, White, received the most votes in each. It was then agreed that the two houses should meet in joint session at noon the next day, January 11, and every day thereafter until a choice was made.

Since George A. Perkins was already representing northern California in the United States Senate, southern California was desirous of having a representative. Among the nominees the following were from southern California: Grant of San Diego, Bulla and White of Los Angeles, and Bard of Hueneme.

The name of Thomas R. Bard was placed in nomination by Senator Chester Rowell, and on almost every ballot he received the votes of Rowell and Thomas Flint, Jr., president pro tempore of the Senate. On many ballots he also received the vote of Assemblyman Greenwall.

The meetings developed into a fight between the supporters of Burns and those of Grant, with neither faction able to control the required number of votes. The joint meetings continued until March 18, with the deadlock unbroken. On the final ballot, which was the 103rd of the session, Burns and Grant received thirty votes. The regular session of the legislature closed on March 19, having balloted for seventy-six days with no one chosen to replace Senator White whose term expired March 4.



This meant that for a time California was not to have her full representation in the United States Senate, a fact which distressed a great many citizens of California since at that time various matters of vital interest to California were before Congress. One of these was the passage of a measure authorizing the completion of the work already begun upon San Pedro harbor. The Far East question was also perturbing Californians.

Thus conditions remained until January 23, 1900, when Governor Henry T. Gage issued a proclamation convening the legislature in extraordinary session. This proclamation consisted of seventeen pages of closely typewritten copy, giving sixteen reasons why the governor deemed it necessary to call the extra session. The first of these was the election of a senator.

During the months between the regular and extra sessions, a vigorous political war had been waged in the newspapers. The Los Angeles *Times* in particular launched itself against Burns and his Southern Pacific backers.

Gage's proclamation came as a surprise, as caucus pledges upon which the calling of the extra session was supposed to depend had not been secured. A newspaper article in the Los Angeles *Evening Express* mentioned that among the aspirants being talked up were Thomas Bard of Ventura County, Congressman Burham, Irving M. Scott, E. S. Pillsbury, Geo. A. Knight, Van P. Patterson, and Daniel Burns. An exclusive dispatch from San Francisco to the Los Angeles *Times* on January 23rd stated that among politicians there it was regarded as quite certain that Dan Burns had a majority of the Republican caucus pledged, or Governor Gage would not have issued the call. It was intimated that Governor Gage favored Burns.

There were 85 Republican legislators, which meant that in open caucus 43 votes for Burns would give him the election. His agents had been industrious and as he had thirty votes in the first session it was not regarded as a difficult matter for him to secure thirteen more who would vote for him in caucus.

Still, the anti-Burns men were equally confident in the prediction that Burns could not secure the prize. Grant had withdrawn from the race and his adherents claimed that they would favor any man who could beat Burns, and were inclined toward Irving M. Scott. Milton M. Green, a Grant man, said that he had received several pressing invitations to go into the Burns camp but he had declined.

General W. H. L. Barnes, who received twenty votes during the contest at the regular session, declared himself out of the field.

On January 25th, the Los Angeles *Evening Express* mentioned that the name of Thomas R. Bard of Ventura County was being talked up, and commented: "Mr. Bard is in every sense of the word a representative of Southern California. He would regard the election as senator as a high honor, but would not expend a \$20 bill, as he once expressed it, illegitimately to secure the place. That he is in every way qualified for the position is conceded wherever he is known."





Senator Bard riding in carriage with President Theodore Roosevelt, Ventura, 1902

When the legislature met in Sacramento on Monday, January 29, the hotel lobbies were filled with persons interested in the outcome of Governor Gage's extra session. All were determined that the deadlock could not continue. Someone had to be elected! Assemblyman W. S. Melick of Pasadena said to a representative of the *Los Angeles Times*, "I think Thomas R. Bard's chances are as good as anybody's." Greenwell of Ventura was quietly working for Bard. He was said to have eighteen votes promised.

When the legislature met on Tuesday, January 30, it was decided to put the balloting for senator off until the next week. In the meantime the Republicans decided to hold a general caucus in order to come to some agreement on a candidate.

By the next day the call for a Republican caucus was receiving signatures. The papers said Bard's "stock was rising." It was recalled that "when he ran as presidential elector he ran way ahead of his ticket. He is a man of honor who has the best interests of the people and the Republican party at heart." United States Senator Perkins' friends were rallying to Bard's support. They were looking forward to Perkins'



re-election and realized that he would have a better chance if the other incumbent was from the southern part of the state. The Democrats had come out for Major James D. Phelan of San Francisco, reserving one complimentary vote for the Honorable Stephen M. White, the retiring senator, whose term had expired the previous March 4th.

By Thursday, February 1, the papers reported that a boom was being worked up for Bard, and that he had developed considerable strength. A telegram was sent Bard asking him to come to Sacramento, saying conditions warranted his presence at the capitol. The telegram was signed by seven senators and seven assemblyman.

Bard had not been seeking the office, although he had signified that he would be glad to serve if elected. His campaign was being conducted entirely by his friends. Therefore, when the telegram arrived at a time when the press of business was great he at first decided not to go, and wrote a telegram to that effect. However, his brother-in-law, C. W. Gerberding, happened along at that moment and persuaded him to change his mind. Headlines on the morning of February 2 proclaimed, "The Honorable Thomas Robert Bard of Ventura County is Forging to the Front. The election of the Man from the Bean Country is Predicted."

No unanimity was reached in the Republican caucus on the evening of Feb. 1, but votes for Bard continued to increase. Bard arrived in Sacramento on February 2 and opened quarters. His only statement to newspapers at this time was, "I have no statement to make regarding the fight that is being made for me further than to say that the position taken by my friends in the matter has given me much satisfaction."

In the caucus which was continued Friday evening the anti-Burns Republicans gave him solid support and he was selected as the caucus nominee of his party. The election now seemed assured. Daniel Burns formally withdrew from the contest. The state political machine thus met severe defeat.

The unanimity displayed in this caucus was declared by old-timers to be part of "one of the most remarkable scenes ever witnessed in California." It was declared to be "a remarkable triumph of pure politics over trickery." Another paper, the *Los Angeles Evening Express* said:

"It is being recalled with satisfaction that the result in the recent bitterly contested senatorial battle is unique in California politics in that it will have been the first time in this state in which a man without spending a dollar, with some of the most powerful elements in his own party against him, with no organization behind him, and with but little real newspaper support, has won a senatorial toga.

"Those who know Thomas R. Bard here are predicting that Mr. Bard will make an ideal senator and a most worthy successor to Stephen M. White. He is an unqualified supporter of the San Pedro harbor, and of all else at Washington desired by the people of Los Angeles and Southern California."



The San Francisco *Chronicle* said of the caucus choice:

"Mr. Bard is a man of fine presence, large frame, keen gray eyes and pleasing address. His friends boast that he has not spent so much as the price of a cigar to secure his nomination."

Another article in the same issue said, "Mr. Bard is a man of ability and power, with no unsavory political affiliations—and utterly beyond the reach of the Southern Pacific railroads."

Assemblyman Atherton said to him in his rooms at the hotel when a delegation of legislators waited on him informally after the caucus, "It is a great day in the history of the state, that you, Mr. Bard, unknown to most of us, should come here today without managers or a sack, to receive our nomination for United States Senator."

The Los Angeles *Times* stated that State Senator Thomas Flint of San Benito, president pro tempore of the Senate was perhaps more than any one man, instrumental in carrying the anti-Burns fight to a triumphant conclusion in favor of Bard. However, Bard is quoted as saying, "The result was brought about largely through the efforts of Senators Bulla and Howell."

On Monday, February 5, the election of the caucus nominee was generally conceded. Bard was receiving telegrams of congratulations from prominent leaders of the state. The papers of February 6 stated that the Southern Pacific Railroad had given up the fight, and that Burns had accepted defeat with the best possible grace, counseling his followers to vote for his rival in the interests of party harmony. The headlines read, "All for Bard. Ventura man now has solid Republican support."

At 12 o'clock, noon, on Tuesday, February 6, 1900, Senator Cutter offered the resolution that the United States Senator to succeed Stephen M. White should be elected. This resolution was adopted, and the secretary of the Senate, by direction of the President, then read the Act of Congress governing the election of senators. The president announced that nominations for United States senator were in order.

Senator Chester Rowell of Fresno nominated Thomas R. Bard, as he had done at the regular session. In his nomination speech he said:

"A position has sought the man, not a man the position. Without any inherited fortune, or other advantages than those which resulted from his natural capacity and energy, Mr. Bard has accumulated large wealth, by the development of natural resources, through his executive ability, untired industry, and sound business judgement. Since his residence in the State he has been prominently identified with the party in his own locality, and has received recognition from the party of the State—twice a delegate to the national convention, and as an elector in the campaign of 1892 . . . He is a man who would be free from all corporation entanglements, and one on whose character there could be no stain."

Senators Boyce, Davis, Gillett, Wolfe, Bulla, and Shortridge made speeches seconding the nomination. These speeches were followed by the



nomination of the Democratic candidate, Mayor Phelan, by Senator Simons. His nomination was seconded by State Senator Doty.

Since there were no further nominations, the President of the Senate declared the nominations closed, and directed the secretary to call the roll of the Senate, that each senator might announce the name of the person for whom he voted. The whole number of votes cast was thirty-six, so the number necessary for a choice was nineteen. Bard received twenty-six and Phelan ten. Since T. R. Bard received a majority of all the votes cast for United State Senator, he was declared the choice of the Senate for the term of six years commencing March 4, 1899, to succeed Stephen White.

Similar proceedings were taking place in the Assembly at the same time. The Assembly, floor, gallery, and lobby were packed when the noon hour came. Valentine of Los Angeles had been given the honor of naming Bard in the lower house, and was followed by Cobb of San Francisco who had formerly been a Burns man. He said:

"The time has come for us to unite and place the toga upon the shoulders of some honest, able, energetic and courageous man, who will make an aggressive fight on behalf of the interests peculiar to this coast and assist us to win victory in our struggle for commercial and industrial supremacy. Mr. Bard has every requisite of this important office to a marked degree. His character is plainly written in his face. He needs no one to vouch for him. He is a man eminently fitted and qualified to fill this responsible position with credit to himself and honor to the State and Nation."

This nomination was seconded by Assemblymen Works, Lardner, Belshaw, Clough, Dunlap, Johnson, Pierce, and Melick. Assemblyman Mack nominated J. D. Phelan, and the nomination was seconded by E. D. Sullivan. Nominations were closed and the vote taken with the following results: number of votes cast eighty, number necessary for a choice forty-one; Thomas R. Bard received fifty-nine, J. D. Phelan twenty, and one complimentary vote was cast for ex-Senator White.

The next day, February 7, 1900 at 12 o'clock, according to the Act of Congress for election of United States senators, the two houses of the legislature met in joint assembly. The proceedings of the day previous were read by the secretary of each house and the President of the Senate therefore declared Bard elected. Bard was then invited to address the joint assembly and made the following address:

"Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen of the Senatorial Convention: I fully appreciate and thank you, as the representatives of the people of the State of California, for the honor that you have conferred upon me. I accept the office to which you have been pleased to elect me, fully realizing its responsibilities, and the services which are inseparable from it. And, invoking God's aid, I shall undertake to discharge the duties of the office, having in view as my highest reward the commendation of the people of the State. Honesty and industry are common virtues, but relying upon these, I hope to win that reward."

After Bard's speech a resolution was adopted thanking White for





The Bard cottage at the site of Bard No. 1, the first well drilled by the Scott syndicate

his distinguished service, and then the joint assembly adjourned. In three days more the remaining business of the session was concluded.

The *Los Angeles Evening Express* said of Bard's speech: "It occupied two minutes but was a gem." The newspapers also said that Bard's appearance before the legislature was the signal for much enthusiasm. It was the last act in a drama that had occupied California for thirteen months. Everyone felt that the solution was a happy one, that Bard would make an ideal senator. His election was felt to be a splendid consummation of the victory for better state politics. Senator Perkins telegraphed from Washington his congratulations to both the legislature and Bard.

The extra session cost \$32,002. Assemblyman L. H. Valentine said, "The session will go down in the history of the state as remarkable in more ways than one. It was the shortest, one of the most economical, and was the culmination of one of the greatest political battles ever fought in the state."

The following remarks were made by Bard to men who sought to secure his patronage:

"Gentlemen, I hold no animosity against men. I appreciate that I will be elected by the whole party and I recognize no factions as to patronage. I shall distribute it for the good of the party and the state



as a whole, and, therefore, I will not listen to any demands upon me at this time."

Thus closed the exciting legislative contest, and the legislature had chosen wisely. Bard was admirably equipped to represent California and the southwest. A California pioneer, he had fought his way to leadership by clear-sighted judgement in business affairs, rugged honesty, and a whole-hearted devotion to the highest interests of the region he had chosen for his home.

When his election was assured, Bard was besieged by newspaper men and agreed to answer questions designed to elicit his views upon his nomination and upon topics of national importance. He said he felt himself under no obligation to any concern for his election and as a result felt that his election would harmonize the Republican party. Concerning his views on expansion he said that he believed in retaining our new possessions and maintaining the flag wherever it was then floating. He was in accord with the administrations policy. He was thoroughly in favor of San Pedro harbor improvement and wanted to see it completed immediately as planned by the government engineers. Regarding his views on the proposed canal, he said, "I am in favor of an isthmian canal, whether Nicaraguan or at Panama is for the future to decide, so that it remains under the control of the United States government."

He expressed himself as being opposed to aggregation of capital for the purpose of monopolizing or restricting trade. He expected to be in entire harmony with Senator George C. Perkins, and said his first step would be in working against the proposed Jamaican and French reciprocity treaties. Bard further stated that he was an extreme protectionist and thoroughly Republican in his political views.

Thus he prepared to take his seat untrammelled by promise to any man or body of men, appreciative of the responsibilities and services that are inseparable from the office.

He was soon in receipt of a letter from Senator Perkins expressing pleasure at the prospect of welcoming him to Washington and assuring him that he would do all he could to smooth his way in the new work.

Bard spent the next few weeks attending receptions in his honor, and in putting his affairs in shape to leave for Washington. He left on February 27, to serve a five year term, the term having been shortened by the delay in the election of a senator.

Senator Bard's term in the United States Senate was his last public service, although he continued his business activities almost to the day of his death, and enjoyed to the fullest the final years of a busy and useful life. His life, after his senatorial term ended in March, 1905, was a retired one in comparison to his activities as a pioneer of California.

Coming to California when it was still in its pastoral stage he had been instrumental in installing new customs which overrode the old traditions. He had possessed the rare gift of leadership, and as a leader men accepted him. They were fortunate in their choice, for to him



right was right and wrong was wrong and he was congenitally incapable of compromise with either.

He had ever been like a cyclone in office, dominating every situation. Among the arduous enterprises he had essayed were oil, sheep raising, lands development, banking and politics. He had been president of the Berylwood Investment Company, the Bank of Ventura, which he had helped found in 1875, the Bank of Hueneme, which he also incorporated, the Hueneme Wharf Company, Quimichis, and Las Posas Water Company, the Simi Land and Water Company, the Union Oil Company, the Sespe Oil Company, the Torrey Canon Oil Company, and the Mission Transfer Company which owned pipe lines and refineries at Santa Paula. He was director of the State Board of Agriculture, 1886-1887, of the Graham and Loftus Oil Company, the Sacramento Valley Sugar Company, and the Potter Hotel Company. In 1882 on the death of Scott he was appointed administrator of his California estate, and disposed of it in the interest of the heirs.

With his brother he had helped found the Pioneer Society of Ventura County and had served as its president. The Board of Supervisors was persuaded to give a room in the courthouse as the permanent home of the Pioneer Museum. This museum grew out of the relics presented by Dr. Cephas L. Bard.

In religion Senator Bard embraced the Presbyterian faith, and built the Presbyterian Church of Hueneme, of which he was ruling elder and superintendent of the Sunday School for many years. He also represented California in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. Mrs. Bard was an Episcopalian, so another church was financed by the Bard family. Hueneme was fortunate in thus acquiring two attractive churches.

After his retirement from the Senate, Senator Bard served by appointment of Governor Gillett as regent of the University of California.

During these later years he spent much of his time at his home near Hueneme, named Berylwood after his eldest daughter. He had made his home here since he had built the wharf in 1871. It was here that he indulged in his taste for gardening. Flowers were his hobby, and in his forty or fifty acre garden he developed a new seedling rose which he called "The Beauty of Berylwood." During a trip abroad in 1899 he had secured many rare and choice plants.

However, in spite of semi-retirement Senator Bard still oversaw his extensive landed interests. His old friends E. M. and S. N. Sheridan said of him, "In his long business career he handled and owned and controlled thousands upon thousands of acres of land, had bought and sold and leased, had seen his acres grow thick in population and wealth, but never had recorded against him any word of censure from his neighbors or from the vast numbers with whom he had dealings. He was never in the courts over land sales."

Old friends tell of his loyalty to his friends, of his many deeds of generosity. He supported several old time friends and loaned money to many with no thought of its return.



The Baltimore *American* of June 22, 1908, thus described Senator Bard as he appeared during these years:

"One of the most distinguished citizens of California, the Honorable Thomas R. Bard of Ventura County, is a guest at the Belvedere . . . He is a tall, distinguished looking gentleman and has the refinement and courtly bearing of the old school."

Senator Bard died March 5, 1915, at the age of seventy-four, as a result of heart failure. The end of this well-known pioneer came peacefully at his home in Hueneme between two-thirty and three o'clock in the afternoon. His death was discovered by his attendant who was in the room at the time. He had been in comparatively good health during the previous few weeks, so his death was a shock.

At the time of his death the newspapers of the state commended the distinguished service he had rendered to his state and nation, and reviewed the many things he did which still live in the history of his section and state. To him southern California owes many of her material advantages. The Los Angeles *Times* closed a biography of him with the words:

"The life of Thomas Robert Bard, ex-Senator of the United States, capitalist, friend of the people, and advocate of clean living and political integrity, offered the rising generation an example that must drive home to those who knew him the force of the axiom 'To live well, live wisely.'"

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Los Angeles *Times*, January 5, 24, 25, 29; February 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 27, 1900.

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San Francisco *Chronicle*, February 3, 7, 1900.

George C. Perkins, letter to Bard, Washington, February 22, 1900.



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*Ventura County Mutual Fire Insurance Co.* Organized on April 4, 1898 with E. P. Foster, president; Nathan Blanchard, vice-president and Charles Barnard, secretary. This old Ventura County business firm has faithfully followed the high standards set by its pioneer founders.

*Santa Paula Savings and Loan Association.* Organized in April 1890 as the Santa Paula Building and Loan Association with J. R. Haugh, president; Caspar Taylor, vice-president and H. H. Youngken, secretary. This organization has served the interests of home owners and builders, as well as those of the investor.

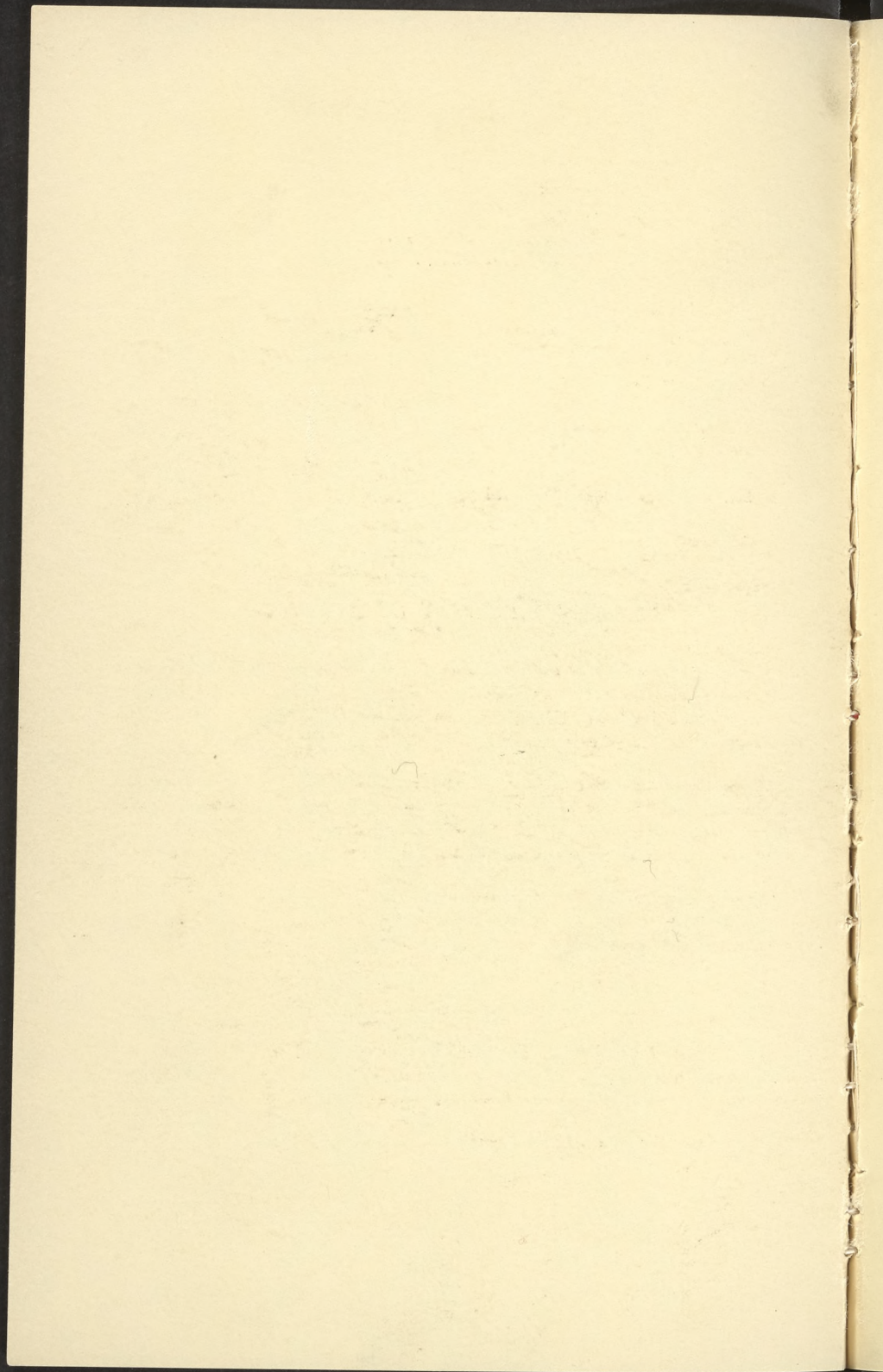
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*County Stationers, Inc.,* 532 E. Main, Ventura. Since 1898 Ventura County's complete stationer and office furniture dealer.

*Bank of A. Levy,* 143 W. Fifth St., Oxnard. Founded in 1900 by the late Achille Levy, who came to Hueneme in 1875. Since its inception Bank of A. Levy has been closely allied with the farm and ranch industries of Ventura County.

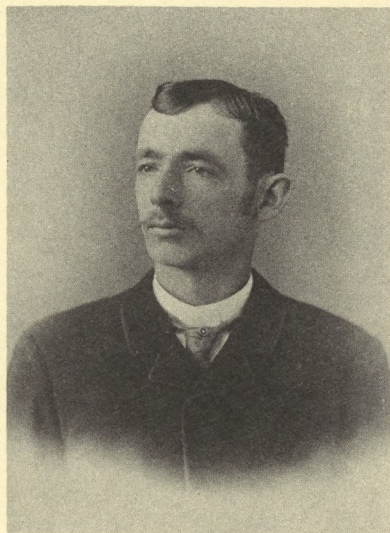
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*The*  
VENTURA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
*QUARTERLY*



WILLIAM STEIN

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RECOLLECTIONS OF A PIONEER OIL DRILLER



# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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The Ventura County Historical Society's headquarters is the Pioneer Museum, 77 North California Street, Ventura, California. There are three classes of membership—active, \$5 per year, sustaining, \$25 per year and life, \$100.

The QUARTERLY is published in February, May, August and November from the Society's headquarters at the Pioneer Museum. The editorial staff is composed of Chas. F. Outland, Chairman, Mrs. D. A. Cameron, Mrs. C. R. Nieland, Grant Heil and Robert Pfeiler.

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# The Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly

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## Billy Stein and the Early Days of the Petroleum Industry

The beginning of the petroleum industry in California is one of the fascinating historical stories of the state. There have been a number of published works, such as *Black Bonanza*, that have covered the subject; but accounts by the men who actually participated are uncommon. The one that comes readily to mind is W. E. Youle's *Sixty-Three Years In the Oilfields*. Published in Taft, California in 1926, the book is now difficult to find and commands a premium when available.

It is gratifying, therefore, to be able to print the story as written by one of Youle's contemporaries—an account which is, in our opinion, superior in many respects to Youle's. The late William (Billy) Stein was the writer, and it may come as a surprise to Billy's numerous friends to learn of the broad part he played and witnessed in the formative years of an industry that has grown to such tremendous proportions. Some credit for the Stein narration must be given to Santa Paula's pioneer physician, Dr. D. W. Mott, as Stein states at the beginning of his manuscript, "In a letter from my friend, Dr. D. W. Mott, he says, 'During our last visit I spoke to you about the necessity of your writing something of the beginning of the petroleum industry in California. You are now the only living witness to that beginning. You should immediately do that service for historical correctness.' Because of this, I have written the following."

It is obvious (and regrettable) that Billy either did not finish the manuscript, or if he did, the remaining portions have been lost. The years spent with the Empire Oil Company and later the Capitol Crude Oil Company would have added much material of interest and historical importance to the story.

Dr. Mott noted on the original manuscript that it was excellent. We agree, and hope our readers will also.



# Recollections of a Pioneer Oil Driller

As written by William Stein in 1936

November 6, 1936 I will have been in California fifty-seven years. I have followed oil well drilling as a trade all that time. If not as a workman in the derrick, it was as superintendent in charge of drilling for oil. I served my apprenticeship here in this state. I had had no experience elsewhere. I started to work in 1880 in Moody Gulch, Santa Clara County, California. It is in the Santa Cruz Mountains fifteen miles from San Jose. The nearest railroad town was Alma, three miles away. The town consisted of the depot, one merchandise store, an hotel, and one blacksmith shop.

My home state is Mississippi. I accompanied my sister, Mrs. John Dull, and her three children to California. Their home was in Rouseville, Pennsylvania. Her husband had already arrived in California and was employed as a pumper at the wells which had previously been drilled in Moody Gulch.

The company was composed of some of the wealthy men of California. It was called the "Santa Clara Oil and Petroleum Company." The Honorable C. N. Felton, afterwards appointed United States Senator, was president; D. C. Scofield, secretary—later he was the first president of the Standard Oil Company of California; Lloyd Tevis of California; and I. E. Blake, President of the Continental Oil and Transportation Company of Pennsylvania. These same men were also interested in a search for oil in Pico Canyon near Newhall. At that time they centered their chief exploration in Moody Gulch, that locality being more favorable as a marketing place and indications showing that the oil was of higher quality and differed only slightly from eastern Pennsylvania oil.

The first well started there was 1877. The rig and tools were the most primitive known, a spring pole affair. Difficulties were encountered and the attempt was finally abandoned. This work was not by the Santa Clara Company. I never heard the name of it, but the expenses were met by a Colonel Boyer of San Jose. He was president of the gas manufacturing company of San Jose. Mr. Scofield had formerly lived in the oil regions of Pennsylvania and was acquainted with contractors engaged in drilling wells there. He got in touch with a Mr. W. E. Youle; and after the Santa Clara Oil Company had secured leases on the Moody property, he sent for Youle<sup>1</sup>. When he came out, they got together a small steam drilling rig, secured some tools, cable and pipe, and resumed work on the abandoned well which had reached a depth of about four hundred feet. This well was started on the upper edge of the formation, the shallow depth. At six hundred and thirty feet they penetrated an oil sand and brought in a small six barrel well of fifty-three gravity oil<sup>2</sup>. The diameter of this well was such that there was no chance of going deeper, consequently work ceased. This



was in 1878. The well was pumped and the oil hauled to San Jose where it was used in the gas works. There were no geologists in those days, but the showing was such as to give the company much encouragement.

It was then a matter of shipping the best equipment from the east here, and finding crews and drillers and helpers to put the wells down. Mr. Scofield went east and contracted with Mr. W. W. Dull to come out, bring his crews and rigs, and drill by contract.

In the meantime, the company had a standard rig, tools, cables, and pipe shipped to Moody from the east. A fair rig was built. This time the location was some two hundred and fifty feet up the canyon on a deeper proposition. Mr. Youle had built a house, sent for his family, and secured men who had some experience in drilling. With fair luck a seventy-five barrel well was brought in. By that time Mr. Dull and his brother John had arrived. The two wells were on production, and roads were in progress for new locations. A plot of land was purchased on the narrow gauge railroad which ran from Alameda Point to Santa Cruz. Two miles of two inch pipe line was laid to the siding, wooden tanks were set up, office buildings and houses for men built, and the railroad site named Oil City.

My first work was with pick and shovel on roads, etc., at two-fifty per day from seven a.m. to five p.m. It was the first real pay work that I had ever had. My sister had made arrangements to board the drillers and helpers. They built her a good redwood house and a cook-house. For the men they built what was then known as a bunkhouse. They also employed a Chinese cook, and all went merrily on. There was lots of excitement getting ready to drill in earnest.

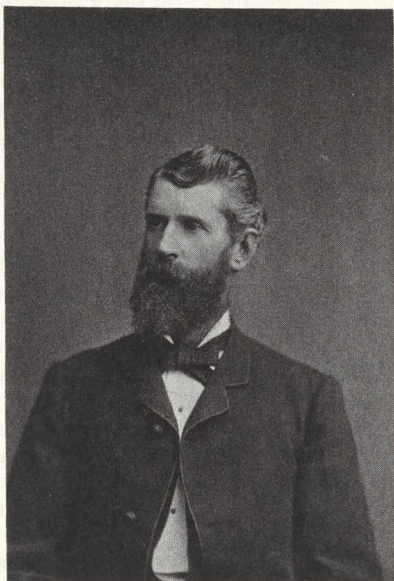
We eastern people had never experienced a winter like the following one. At first it was like summer compared with what we left in Pennsylvania. In the east there was usually snow and ice. Here we had rain and mud.

Moody Gulch was narrow with steep mountain sides and a beautiful little trout stream which found its way down to the Los Gatos Creek. Ferns and poison oak were abundant, and there were many redwood, oak, and madrone trees. The redwoods were large and tall. The oak, a different species from what we have in the southern part of the state, was called "tan bark." The bark was used in the tanneries in San Jose. At one time a sawmill had operated in the gulch. Its logging runway was still in evidence. The roads were built on the side of the creek. They were one-way and steep sided. The locations for wells were graded on the mountainside.

The number three well was progressing. So was the rain. It was said that it rained fifty-six inches in that locality that season. The slides commenced to come down and by a miracle the crew on number three escaped being buried. The whole mountain, including trees and stumps, slid down on the rig. That finished number three forever. A portion of the rig was recovered and removed.

About that time I was promoted to a job as tooldresser on number four well. Mr. W. E. Youle was driller. Somehow I made good. I also





W. W. Dull

received three dollars per day. This well was finished four months later and was even better than number two. It was eleven hundred and fifty feet deep. The fuel used in the boilers was wood, and you can be sure it kept one busy. The madrone timber made the best fuel because it was harder grained than the redwood. After number four made such a good showing, it began to look as though a real strike would come.

More rigs were ordered, and number five and six were in the course of construction. The company had leased up additional territory, and a rig was being built on the John Logan property. A refinery was being erected at Alameda Point, also. This refinery operated for some little time after operations ceased in Moody Gulch. I do not know what other products were put on the market, with the exception of kerosene. Gasoline was not much in demand those days. Mr. F. E. Davis distributed that commodity in San Francisco and Oakland at that time. Later, he came to Santa Paula and was connected with the Mission Transfer Company. After that he was in partnership with Mr. A. L. Drown in the livery business. Mr. Drown now lives (1936) in Ojai. Mr. Davis passed away some years ago.

Mr. Youle and I were still together, and number five well was started. My driller was very kind to me and helped me in every way. He permitted me to relieve him at times so he could warm up at the



boiler and occasionally replenish the fire. I soon began to become familiar with the art of making hole, as it was commonly called. I wanted to learn, liked the work, and applied myself at every opportunity. We finished the well, which was the first disappointment, a dry hole. Nevertheless, number six was next for me. In the meantime, Logan Number 1 had struck oil. It was not much of a producer, doing less than twenty barrels on the pump after the first few days. The other wells, too, were on the decline. One more rig was in progress, Moody Number 7.

About that time my sister and her husband decided to go to Salt Lake City where a good position had been offered him. Thus, I was left alone. The crews then took over the boarding house proposition.

I was promoted to drilling number 6, which was the deepest well drilled there. Its depth was 1560 feet; and sad to relate, it was also a dry hole. At that time most of the men left. Some of them went to Honolulu to drill for water on the sugar plantations. One or two went east, and some went to Newhall. Our crew went to number 7, and it turned out to be a small producer also.

Mr. W. W. Dull then disposed of all his equipment except one rig which was shipped to Monterey. He had contracted to drill for artesian water for the Del Monte Hotel. Everything being finished up in Moody, I went to Monterey to work for him. A. S. Hathaway, W. P. Logan, George Edwards, and myself made up the crew. This was in the spring of 1881.

Seven wells were drilled by the Santa Clara Oil and Petroleum Company. They included Moody Numbers 1, 2, 3 (which was never finished,) 4, 5, 6, 7, and Logan Number 1. R. C. McPherson leased the Moody from the company and later did some drilling there.

I have already mentioned that these same men were operating in Pico Canyon near Newhall. Most of the drilling equipment had been shipped from Moody to that place.

Going to Del Monte was quite a change from the Gulch. No doubt many of you who read this have been there. Monterey in 1881 was still inhabited by the Spanish and Mexican. It had a delightful climate and also was very interesting. The Del Monte Hotel and grounds were beautiful, and many of the wealthy class spent their week-ends there. We were quartered in tents, camp fashion, and had our meals in camp. Mrs. Hathaway boarded us.

The year we were in Monterey funds were raised for repairs to the Carmel Mission. It is one of the many Missions founded by the Franciscan Fathers. The remains of Father Junipero Serra were placed in a vault in this Mission. During the repairs his remains were exhumed. The ceremony was very impressive. We were permitted to see this. The old Mission was renewed and the old Father still sleeps under its shelter. Another historical landmark was also in evidence near the beach. It was an oak tree where it is said the Fathers gathered on landing, and held their rites in commemoration of their safe arrival and the possession of this spot.



The rig arrived in due time; we put it up and were soon drilling. The first 600 feet was easy. We thought the job would soon end. However, we struck good solid granite and plenty of brackish water. The contract called for 1250 feet, and it took nearly three months to complete the well. Progress was slow, at an average of about 5 feet per every 24 hours. Tools had to be sharpened often, in fact every time they were drawn from the hole. The blacksmith forge was located in the derrick, and both tooldresser and driller exercised their muscle with 14 pound sledges pounding the drills to proper gauge. An ordinary bellows such as was common at the time in all smithy work was used. The tooldresser pumped it by hand. Later this method of producing air to the forge was improved upon. Some bright mind conceived the idea of using a couple of small pulleys and a piece of  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch rope attached to the crankshaft of the bandwheel. So to the formation man, California drillers, the credit must go for not only this one simple improvement, but for many others which I shall try to mention later.

Visitors were not uncommon and we always tried to tell them the truth, something hardly expected of a driller now days. When the work was near completion, a gentleman dropped in about one-thirty one morning. I recognized him at once. After passing us cigars, no five centers, he located a seat on the forge and made himself comfortable. He explained that he frequently spent week-ends at the hotel. This morning he was restless and could not sleep. He said he heard the drilling engine running—a drilling engine when at work makes a different sound than other engines. From the sound he judged that a well was in operation nearby and he wanted to know what was going on. After we told him who was contracting the work and what we hoped to strike, he wanted to know where our next location would be. After this long conversation he remarked, "I believe I have seen you before." I then told him that I had recognized him when he entered the rig, and that he had seen me many times in Moody Gulch, and at one time had given me a nice check of fifty dollars for giving some special care to the drilling machinery while at work. The gentleman I allude to was none other than C. N. Felton, president of both companies, whom I mentioned at the beginning of my story.

Mr. Felton informed us that he wanted all the drillers and machinery he could get to go to Newhall to drill for oil. He purchased the outfit from Mr. Dull, and on completion of the contract we took it down and shipped it to the P. C. O. Oil Company<sup>3</sup> at Newhall. Mr. Hathaway and I entered into a verbal contract to drill a well, Number 7 San Fernando. Having arranged all details regarding the shipment of tools and rig, etc., three of the gang, myself included, secured passage on the coastal steamer, Orizaba, to Santa Barbara. It was a side-wheeler. Arriving there after a pleasant trip, we stopped over one night and left Santa Barbara by stage in the morning. Our next stop was Santa Paula. This kind of travel was new to us, and we enjoyed it very much.

C. N. Baker was proprietor of the hotel in Santa Paula. McMillan



Livery Stable cared for the stage stock. They changed horses three times between Santa Barbara and Newhall. The changes were at Ventura, Santa Paula, and Buckhorn. There were no bridges over streams those days but there were fords across the Ventura River and Santa Paula, Sespe and Piru creeks. There seemed to be considerable water in them.

We finally reached Newhall. That town boasted a really fine hotel called the Southern. It was built, I am told, by the Newhalls who named the town. There was also a general merchandise store, a small drug store, two blacksmith shops, the depot and freight house, and nearby a small distillation plant was in operation. D. C. Scott operated this small plant.

Our crew, having reported present, was ready for Pico the next move. There being no accommodations, it was necessary to put up tents. Mr. Hathaway and I were partners, and George Edwards and W. P. Logan were our tooldressers. Mr. Hathaway boarded us. We helped put up the rig and laid pipe lines for water and oil. The company, of course, paid us daily wages for our labor. In those days labor was in earnest, and the idea was to accomplish all one could for his pay.

Our contract to drill Number 7, San Fernando was a verbal agreement made in the presence of C. N. Felton, D. G. Scofield, and C. A. Mentry, who was field superintendent. This agreement was fulfilled to the letter by the company as well as by ourselves.

The drillers and helpers from the eastern fields were good men who had proven experts back there. Some of them seemed to question the ability of California educated drillers and, in a way, offered advice. They promptly named us the formation crew. It was all in good part, and we accepted the term applied and later did not hesitate to answer to the name.

W. E. Youle was an assistant to Mentry, and several wells were in progress. Mr. Youle seemed somewhat put out because he did not have the authority to supervise the job we were undertaking. I never understood his attitude, as he and I were fellow workmen and got along nicely<sup>4</sup>. He made his protests to the company, fearing, he said, that it would cost them a lot of money to turn that whole responsibility over to us. However, we were left to ourselves. Of course, we had our difficulties, but managed to clear the troubles without assistance.

In the meantime, quite a few of the eastern men quit and returned home. The drillers preferred to dress tools rather than drill. They found a vast difference between Pennsylvania and California, so far as drilling was concerned. It was difficult to keep on with the work. However, under the supervision of Mentry and Youle, the following men were finally game enough to fight it out. They were: John McGuinness, Mel Kellerman, Mat McCormack, Hugh McCormack, Pat Regan, William Downey, Jake Hanst, William Forker, Billy Johnson, Dan Pardee, Hall Proudfoot, and Jack Hall.

After much difficulty some of the wells were put on production. We had a hard time during the fall and winter. In Moody it was rain





Drilling crew in Monterey, 1881

Standing, left to right: Wm. Stein, A. S. Hathaway, drillers; seated: W. W. Dull, contractor; W. P. Logan and Geo. Edwards, tooldressers.

and mud; in Pico it was snow and ice. Tenting wasn't so jolly but we stuck it out. With some delays and fishing jobs to our credit, we finished our contract, which was 1500 feet. At that depth there was only a slight showing of oil and gas. The company had us drill deeper at their say when to quit. Of course, it was at a different price per foot. At 2300 feet we struck a volume of salt water which came to the 200 foot level. This made drilling slow and at 2464 feet work was stopped. It was the first deep well of that era in California. We tubed and pumped the well a number of days on company pay. It was doing about 50 barrels of salt water and three barrels of oil per day. They removed the pipe, etc. and abandoned it.

Pico Canyon boasted a boarding house about this time. The proprietor was Mr. Skelly. His wife and daughter took care of it, and he worked on the roads, etc. Pico differed from Moody inasmuch as there were only a few trees. There was one good sized oak near the eating house where on Sundays the men who had not gone to town would gather for a friendly game of poker or dice. The men did not work on Sunday except in cases of necessity. Many of them went to Newhall where they could have a better time, enjoy larger games, etc. Some of them liked their beer, and some of them went in for stronger stuff. All in all, they were good-natured, and no bad mix-ups occurred.



On Sundays an old-fashioned preacher would ride in on horseback and preach from the porch of the boarding house. Of course, the hat was passed; and at times he would be liberally rewarded, especially about payday, which came the first day of the month. At other times it depended on how much the boys had left or how well their winnings held out. Several times Mr. A. Hopper, a noted person of those days gave a political talk to pass the time away.

The canyon had a machine shop with lathes and drill presses. There was a regular blacksmith to repair tools, etc. A large boiler house furnished power for the machinery in the shop, and pumps supplied water to the different storage tanks. For a time water was pumped from the Santa Clara River about eight miles away, and the drinking water was filtered.

About a mile down the canyon there was a schoolhouse and another boarding and rooming house which took care of the guests of the company. Mr. C. D. Reynolds and his wife were in charge. Mr. Mentry also lived there, and the place was called "Mentryville."

By this time the company had been successful in bringing in several good wells. Mr. M. R. Craig was put in as general manager and made his home in Mentryville.

Having finished our well, our crew was scattered on different jobs for awhile until a road and rig site was completed in what was known as Salt Canyon. It was a wildcat three-quarters of a mile west of Pico. As it was too far to travel back and forth to work, they built a very comfortable four room house about two hundred yards from the rig. We were all to ourselves there. To drill this well, a verbal agreement was made, the same as for No. 7. On reaching 500 feet, two-thirds of the amount due was payable and so on until the well was completed or until the 1500 foot depth agreed upon was reached. I felt that Mr. Logan was competent and gave him the drillers position. George Edwards was tool dresser with me, and Ben Edwards with Mr. Logan. The two Edwards were not related.

We soon were at work, boarded ourselves and did fairly well. Our supplies were brought over to us by the stage which ran between Newhall and Pico. This well was started in August, 1883. Progress was slow—the formation was entirely different from what we expected. Sometimes it was very soft and on passing through we would find the drill going on the incline, and it would be necessary to back up and redrill. By filling the hole up with oak plugs, the tools could get a shoulder; and by careful work we would eventually straighten it. At times it was necessary to torpedo the bad places.

The fall came in with an unusual amount of rain, our roads were washed out and we were shut it. The railroad between Newhall and Los Angeles was out of commission for some time. The Newhall railroad tunnel was filled with debris and in some places caved in. The fall of '83 and the spring of '84 will long be remembered in this Santa Clara Valley. The food supply became scarce, for the railroad was blocked each side of Newhall. We were forced to abandon work on our contract



for several weeks. This hindered our progress as we had lots of cleaning out to do to get back to where we left off.

The weather continued to be bad, for us at least, but we struggled along as best we could with many costly delays. Finally we reached the 500 foot mark and put in that amount of nine and five-eighths casing. The price agreed upon for that depth was three dollars per foot. Out of that I had to pay three men, the driller received four dollars per day and the tool dressers three-fifty each. Only the actual number of days worked was paid. The four of us shared equally in regards to living expenses. One-third of the contract price was withheld. This was, of course, to protect the company. The equipment all belonged to the company. My part was to pay for repairs and the upkeep. All work of that nature was done at the machine shop in the canyon. Sixty days time for the driller and helpers was over \$600, machine shop and other expenses \$300, which left almost nothing for my own labor and worry. Of course, the one-third held back might later make up my earnings, provided I was as fortunate with this job as with No. 7.

Hardison and Stewart of Pennsylvania entered the field in 1883. They leased from P. C. O. Company some territory close in called Christian Hill. The equipment which they shipped in from the east was the very latest. The drilling tools were most ponderous, a new type called the taper joint, which up to the present time have not been improved. The joints used by the P. C. O. were known as "straight pin." These kind were not so handy nor were they so strong. The heft of the drilling apparatus did not add greatly to progress for they had a tendency to follow the hard surface of the formation and crooked holes were not uncommon. Hardison and Stewart drilled a number of holes, all of which were dry. The P. C. O. then leased them another piece of territory including the well we were working on. I was then informed by Mr. Mentry that Hardison and Stewart would thereafter settle our claims.

The weather cleared, the roads were opened, and we found that we could continue work on the well without further delay. A supply of the next size casing was hauled to the well. We had now reached a more uniform formation of sharp sand rock. Our progress was good and we soon reached the 1000 foot mark. I was then certain that it would not take long to complete the agreement.

Mr. Waldie held the position of paymaster for Hardison and Stewart. I paid him a visit at his office and requested that he have some of the officials come and measure up. I wanted them to satisfy themselves that the well was 1000 feet deep. My men wanted their pay also. Nothing was done about it. Finally I reported to Mr. Mentry that no attention had been given the matter. He mentioned it to Mr. Hardison. Mr. Harvey Hardison and Mr. Mentry came the next day and made the measurement. Mr. Hardison said that the matter would be taken care of. There had been several slight showings of oil and considerable gas at different depths to 900 feet. I managed to carry the seven and five-eighths pipe to 1150 feet and after that continued on in open hole.



I packed between the nine and five-eighths and found we had sufficient gas for lights and heat. No money had appeared, so I again paid a visit to Mr. Waldie. He informed me that their funds were short and that I had to wait until Mr. Lyman Stewart came from the east. That was that, contrary to the Pico Oil Company. From funds I had deposited in Los Angeles from my first well, I paid my men \$460 due them. I then asked them if they would share with me as labor to the finish, taking a chance on getting their money. They were game, and we finished the well in good shape. Funds never did come in handy for Hardison and Stewart, and our labor for 1000 feet is yet unpaid. I finally went to Mr. Felton and stated the situation. All I received for this long siege of worry and hard work was the balance held back on the first 500 feet, which I divided equally with my men. The P. C. O. always lived up to an agreement.

Hardison and Stewart's first well on the property upon which our well was located proved to be a good one. Later, they sold that out to the P. C. O. and came to Adams Canyon, Ventura County. I remained in the field some little time and worked for the P. C. O. by the day.

My next move was to return to Moody Gulch. Remember in those days there were only two places to go for work in the oil fields, Moody and Pico. I saw Mr. R. G. McPherson in Los Angeles. He was looking up a crew to drill in Moody, so I enlisted. Moody seemed more like home. The crew was made up of Frank Grable and myself as drillers, and Erastus Hill and John S. Logan as tool dressers. Grable and Hill were from West Virginia.

Before relating events on the return to Moody, I will mention some of the earlier achievements at Pico. I have this information, not only from Mr. Mentry, but from Chris Leming, a well known citizen of Newhall at that time. He was Justice of the Peace of that section. No doubt, there are a few people living today who knew him. These fine men told me that in 1878 Sanford Lyons drilled with spring pole and brought in a small production at a very shallow depth. Afterward, Mr. Mentry set up a steam powered rig and was successful in bringing in a production of 150 barrels per day. I have been told that this well is still on the list of producers there. Mentry's success came at about the time Moody wells began to decline. However, Moody was first to come in as a commercial section, for the oil from its first little well finished in 1878 and drilled by W. E. Youle and Hathaway, was transported to San Jose and used at the gas plant. Both of these wells were begun in the most primitive way and later deepened and placed on production. Mentry's effort, of course, produced more from the financial aspect and encouraged the industry in California. In later years a four inch pipeline was laid from Newhall to Ventura. This pipeline was taken up about five years ago.

Los Angeles in 1889 had a population of about 6500. The United States, Pico and St. Charles were the leading hosteleries. The city extended to about where the new city hall now stands. Horse cars were in operation, and on Temple Street a cable car served. At the other



end of the city was the railroad station, then called River Street Station. In 1884 the Nadeau Hotel was started, and later Child's Opera House on Main Street. A wonderful change has taken place in fifty years. Newhall, too, has improved; and often on my way to the big city, I have to go back those fifty-odd years and think it over. We used to have fine dances at the hotel and a weekly dancing school. The dances were held at the Southern Hotel. Quite often we would attend dances at the Camulos Rancho. It was then owned by the Del Valles. I picked my first orange from a tree there. The host at the ranch was very hospitable. Wonderful wines and refreshments were served. The place was charming, with beautiful ladies and girls, and you were always heartily asked to "come again." Last month (May, 1936) R. F. Del Valle gave a wonderful talk at the Ventura Pioneer gathering at Foster Park. He went back over the trail of many years, the hardships of the pioneers and their efforts to settle in this part, especially what is now Ventura County. He talked of the first discovery of gold in California and of the beginning of the oil industry. There were other localities where attempts to find oil in paying quantities were made, in that era. Sargents at Gilroy and Purissima at Half Moon Bay proved to be of little value.

I agreed to return to Moody Gulch and work for R. C. McPherson. Work was slack in Pico and not being able to collect from Hardison and Stewart, I returned to Moody early in the year 1884. McPherson decided to deepen Well No. 4 to see if there was not a deeper sand. This was done while the new rig was being built. The new well was located on the Sheppard property not very far from No. 4. No. 4 was deepened to about 1400 feet, but nothing was found to increase production. To finish up, a torpedo was put off at the depth where the former showing was made. This increased production quite a little. The five producing wells in Moody were making about 250 barrels per month, and the oil went to the Alameda Refinery.

Progress on the new well, Sheppard No. 1, was good but no indication of oil was found. We had to wait some little time for all of our pay. When I received mine, I went south to Los Angeles. After going to Pico and finding no opening, I went to work for a Mr. Edwards in Los Angeles. He had patented an oil burner for cook stoves and also for steam boilers. This kept me busy for a few weeks. The oil drilling had settled down to just so many crews in Pico.

I finally quit the oil burning business and got a job in the Southern Pacific Railroad roundhouse. Finally, I was given a job as fireman on a freight over the Tehachapi Pass. I found this very hot work and after a couple of months, I concluded I was not cut out for a railroad man.

I located a job drilling in Hopper Canyon and worked several months for the Fortuna Oil Company. Drilling was finally stopped there and I was again without work. The oil produced there was a very heavy grade, about 10 gravity. They encountered much trouble with water. I never went back to that place.





Mentryville, circa 1899

I heard that there was drilling going on near Santa Paula. On going there, I found that a well was being drilled above Echo Falls in Santa Paula Canyon. An old acquaintance, Joe Anderson, was drilling. They had a spring pole, and you had to climb three flights of steps to get to work. Everything had to be carried up the steps. They did not need any men, and I was not disappointed.

I found that Mr. W. W. Dull was living in Santa Paula and was drilling wells for T. R. Bard. These wells, if I am not mistaken, are those where No. 6 was. No. 6 was the best producer in that locality which gives it the historical mention of No. 6.<sup>5</sup>

The trip by stage to Santa Paula was quite interesting. The fall of '83 and the spring of '84 marked high in rainfall and evidence was noticeable everywhere. There were ruins of houses and barns and high water marks all the way down the valley. Santa Paula Canyon also gave evidence of very high water. I noticed a steam boiler in the creek bed near the first bridge that crosses to the Mears place, now owned by the Harvey Estate. I have been told that this piece of machinery washed from the George Smith place and was used by George Fleischer, who drilled the well on the Smith place, which is now owned by Anlauf.

One trip by stage in the spring of '84 I will never forget. Before my second verbal agreement to drill by contract, I had about \$3500 on deposit in Los Angeles. Waiting for delayed materials, I took another trip to Santa Paula. I had heard about the fertile land and decided to see it and possibly invest my savings. I secured a seat outside by the driver, the better to see the country. All went well until we reached



Piru Creek. It had plenty of water in it, and the driver stopped to water the horses. He handed me a bundle of lines to hold until he could water the team from a bucket which was tied at the rear of the stage. While getting the bucket untied, the horses, which were restless, started to go. The driver dropped the bucket and endeavored to climb over the top of the stage. I pulled on what was in my hands as hard as I could; and about the time the driver reached me, the stage struck a large rock and almost capsized. I let go of everything and jumped. So did the driver. I lost my hat and got soaking wet. I did not have a thing on the driver for he got a bath also. The two passengers inside jumped out in time to get good and wet, a mail bag and few other articles followed my hat; and the team ran to Buckhorn a few miles west and turned into the barn where the horses were changed. The stage was driven back to pick us up. We arrived at Senega, a store where meals were served. The remainder of the journey was a cold ride, especially for those on the outside. Baker's Hotel was filled, but Mr. Baker took me over to Mrs. Growell's on Eighth Street. The lady gave me a good bed and had a fire built in the room. My clothes dried during the night. I looked around the next two days but made no purchase of land.

On my way back I stopped at the Conway place a few miles from Fillmore. I had heard of a fine saddle horse for sale there. This animal was a fine buckskin with a long silver mane and tail. His name was "Hero" and he was the property of Miss Kittie Conway, the belle of the valley and a school teacher. I paid \$125 for horse, saddle and bridle. The animal was a singlefooter, and I resumed my journey on horseback. I found, however, that he had a fault of stumbling, which he demonstrated before I reached Newhall. Later I managed to sell him to the General Superintendent, Mr. M. R. Craig, for considerably more than I paid for him.

After finishing work on McPherson's well, I remained at Alma. I boarded with the Logan family and helped at times on the ranch and with harvesting the hay crop. From there I went to San Jose and worked through the fruit season for A. C. Penniman. He operated a large dryer which dried apricots, peaches, prunes, and apples. This work lasted until late in the fall. I lived with them until the middle of April, 1886 and then returned to Alma to see if anything was going on in the Gulch.

I found that Mr. Alex McDonald was getting together tools, a boiler, and a drilling engine. He had received a contract from the United States Government to drill for water at Mare Island. McDonald was one of the drillers on the Hardison and Stewart producer in Pico. Jake Hanst was the other driller. McDonald was one of the drillers who left Moody to go to the Hawaiian Islands to drill for water. He put me to work at once, and soon after work was started on the island. Jim Wrightman, one of the men from Pico, was my tooldresser, and Pat Regan dressed tools for McDonald. We boarded at the Howard House in Vallejo. Shifts changed at six a.m. and at six p.m. We had



our own row boats, and sometimes it was hard rowing across the channel with the tide going out. No one was allowed to leave the island after the nine o'clock gun, or to land on it until six a.m. A small ferry operated between the island and Vallejo.

We found drilling there very different from what we had been used to. The formations were very soft, and we had difficulty overcoming the trouble they caused. Different kind of pipe had to be used. It was called "stove pipe" and came in short lengths, double sections riveted, with two foot joints, an inside joint, and an outside joint. Hydraulic jacks had to be installed. These were used to keep the pipe moving so that it would not freeze. When freezing occurred, a smaller size had to be used. We started with a fourteen inch hole. I worked there about five months. McDonald could not finish the contract, which was for 1200 feet, so he lost out. When I left, the well was about 450 feet deep and the size of the bore was six inches. On this job I lost about half my pay.

I went back to San Jose and worked at the dryer that season for Mr. Penniman.

The next year I went south to Los Angeles to look up old friends and a job. At the St. Charles Hotel I met Mr. M. P. Nicholson. He had been foreman of the Newhall property at one time. He was then living in Santa Maria. I had met him a few times at the hotel in Newhall. He was there looking up the proposition of drilling for artesian water at Santa Maria. He was getting the necessary equipment and rig to carry on the work. This was a community affair. He asked me what I was doing and when I told him I was looking for work, he stated that he had not yet settled everything with his neighbors, but if I would drop around to the hotel in a couple of days he would talk to me. He wanted a contractor to take the work if he could find one. He said that he was going to Newhall the next morning to see what he could find in that line. I asked him to ask Mr. Mentry or any of the boys there as to my qualifications as a driller. He did so. On his return to Los Angeles, I found him at his hotel. He told me that he was satisfied that I could fill the bill, and that he could get tools and machinery at Newhall. He said that it was not possible to get an outfit to contract the work, and that he would like to have me return with him to Santa Maria, expenses paid. The matter would then be settled as to what would be done. If everything was satisfactory, I was to superintend the work. After spending a day with him in Los Angeles, we went to San Pedro and secured passage on the coastwise steamer, Los Angeles, as far north as Port Hanford. The passage was a little rough and our small steamer seemed to use every effort to turn over. Mr. Nicholson was a thoroughbred though and pulled through. I lost a meal or two but made it O.K. I got in touch with W. P. Logan and had him come as one of the drillers. He brought his brother, John, with him. Another inexperienced man, Jeff Grady, completed the crew. With the help of the town carpenters we put up the rig. It was situated at the intersection of the town's principal streets.



Santa Maria in 1888 was quite a flourishing town. A good section of the country was used for grain raising and some fruit, but water was needed. This project was to ascertain whether or not it could be found. There were four mercantile stores, a good hotel, three saloons, a machine shop, three vegetable markets, a French restaurant, a blacksmith shop, a post office, several other buildings, and quite a few nice residences.

After the rig was completed, work was begun. It soon became evident that different equipment was needed to insure progress. It was necessary to install pumps and hydraulic jacks to keep pressure on the pipe and keep it moving. Double-jointed stovepipe casing was used. Nothing but gravel and sand and an occasional clay formation was encountered. That part of the valley must have once been a very deep canyon, for during the whole work there was no change in the sand, gravel and clay formation. The well was abandoned at 960 feet with every indication of plenty of water, but not artesian. The rig was then moved to Fulgers Point where another attempt was made. At 200 feet asphalt was found. At first it was as hard as coal, but later it became so soft that the hole would close in as soon as the tools were withdrawn. It was while making a fight to overcome this difficulty that Mr. Nicholson was killed. His work team hauled wood to the rig to fire the boiler. On a Saturday afternoon when the day's work was over for the team, the driver unharnessed them and turned them loose in the corral. Mr. Nicholson went in to look them over. One of them had taken a good roll and on getting to his feet, he struck Mr. Nicholson in the stomach. He never regained consciousness. It was, indeed, a sad occurrence, as Mr. Nicholson was a very enterprising citizen and was always trying to improve conditions for the community in which he lived. He had visualized an abundance of water for that section. Work was not resumed on the well. All labor accounts were paid, and the crew drifted to other parts.

I finished up that year by going to work as engineer on a threshing machine working through the Los Alamos Valley and afterward went back to Alma. While working in town, my driller friend, Mr. Youle, happened in. He was broke and wanted work. As there was no vacancy, there was nothing I could do but lend him a few dollars to get back home. I never saw him afterward, though he lived in Los Angeles where he died a few years ago.

I went to San Jose to see Mr. McPherson and found that he was just getting ready to start a new well in Moody. Ed and Bert McCray were already rigging up, and a tool dresser by the name of James McHugh was at work. I was put to work, also. I was not acquainted with the McCray boys but found them to be fine men, and we worked together in harmony for the best results of the well. Like most eastern drillers, they were not accustomed to the difficulties of drilling in California, and for a time they seemed rather disgusted. However, after a little time, they began to realize that it was a fight to keep going and make hole, and fight they did. Soon they became accustomed to



caving walls and cleaning out, and also to making fair progress while doing so. We worked quite hard on that well hoping the geologist had guessed right. After the first 300 feet, progress was much better. A much harder slate formation was found with frequent showings of oil and gas, which was encouraging. We were delayed frequently waiting for pipe, because of fishing jobs, or repairs to the rig and tools.

I bought a horse and cart from McPherson and boarded at the Emerson Hotel in Alma. I also had a room there. The McCrays boarded with McPherson's brother in Moody. During our time off we found good fishing in the Los Gatos Creek and the smaller streams that were tributary to the Los Gatos. Deer, quail, and tree squirrels were plentiful those days, and an occasional grizzly bear was killed.

The fall of the year '89 was quite moist, especially in the mountains, and it made work rather strenuous. The well had reached a depth of 1700 feet, and the indications were good. The bore of the well was still seven and five-eighths inches, and prospects were very good for a deep test. Unfortunately, an accident happened which wrecked the rig and let the tools drop to the bottom with some 600 feet of two and one-eighth inch cable attached. It was a very rainy night, and everything was dripping wet. Mr. Pherson was present at the time and suggested that we shut down until morning or until the storm abated. There was trouble getting the tools from the well. In those days only a single big rope was used to pull the tools. The tool cable as it wound on the shaft increased the size each time a round was made. 1700 feet of wet cable made at least a three foot size spool when it was all on the shaft. After winding about 1000 feet, the big rope began to slip. To make it hold it was necessary to tighten it, or rather, shorten the length, which was done in this case. The weight of the tools pulling, and a reversed engine to help, was too much strain. The bull-wheel post split, and there was no holding the wheels from spinning. There was nothing to do but run for dear life to get away from the flying boards as the wheels raced up and down the derrick. Finally the drilling cable cut in some way which let the tools fall to the bottom. It was a sad looking derrick and a hard blow to the man who put up the money. However, he was thankful that no one was killed. In about ten days the rig was repaired, a new drilling cable put on, and tools for fishing strung up. Then an attachment was served by the sheriff of Santa Clara County. That put an end to operations, and we were told to go to San Jose immediately and file our labor claims.

The McCray boys left for Ventura County. I got work in the blacksmith shop and kept up expenses that way, waiting to see what would come next. I got married, and as no pay had yet come from my work on the well, I wrote Mr. John Erwin at Santa Paula asking him if there was any chance of getting work there. He replied at once, saying to come to Santa Paula and he would give me a drilling job, and wire him when to expect me. I wired him that I could not set the date, but that I would come as soon as I could get enough money



from Mr. McPherson. I had written him of our bad luck and also of my marriage. The same day he wired a Wells Fargo order for \$100.00 to me at Alma. The next day saw us on our way.

Everything seemed to be coming our way, and it proved to be a good move for us. We arrived at Santa Paula without incident, except that I lost my brand new straw hat at Mojave. A twenty minute stop was made there to enable passengers to get something to eat. One of those zephyrs, so frequent at Mojave, was in motion as I stepped out of the car; and my new straw hat sailed out for unknown parts of the desert. People did not go hatless in those days, as is the fashion now, and I felt rather conspicuous making the rest of the trip to Santa Paula bareheaded. We changed cars at Saugus, and on arriving at Santa Paula found the usual crowd waiting to see who arrived and departed. Among them was Uncle John Erwin, who was expecting us as I had wired him when we were leaving Alma. Davis and Drown were running the bus. Mr. Irwin directed us to the Petrolia Hotel. There I found old friends Mr. and Mrs. C. D. Reynolds of Mentryville fame, in charge. We were given a nice room, and the next morning Mr. Irwin came to the hotel and informed me that I was to go to work in Adams Canyon. If I knew of a good man for a tool dresser, I was to get him to come and work with me. I wired James McHugh at Alma. He had asked me to let him know if there was an opening. He arrived a couple of days later. Mr. Irwin told us that we could board at the boarding house in the canyon if we wanted to, but he supposed that we would prefer to be by ourselves. There were no houses available, but we could get along nicely in a tent as some of the men were doing. I could get everything I needed at the Santa Paula Hardware. We bought our first housekeeping equipment there. Mr. Irwin had Mr. Drown load our baggage on a wagon and told him to drive us around and unload at the place we wanted to call home. We located near the pumping station. Mr. Frank Hardison and Mr. C. A. Burrows were taking care of that part of the work. There was plenty of shade from the oak trees. Mr. Irwin furnished us lumber for the floor and side walls of our home. Gas and water lines were handy so we had free fuel for cooking and heating. Mr. Hardison and Mr. Burrows were very helpful to us in making our shack comfortable.

Frank Hardison was the son of Harvey Hardison. Seth Hardison was his brother, and his sisters were Ida Corbett and Ruth Brown. Harvey was killed in the April preceding our arrival by an explosion in the tunnel the company was driving underneath Sulphur Mountain<sup>6</sup>. Several others were killed at that time.

We boarded for a few days at the company boarding house, which I must say, was awful. The cook was a Chinaman, and dirty was no name for it. Finally, the men could stand it no longer, and they fired him out bag and baggage. Mr. Irwin came up to investigate. We were still eating our meals there, and my wife told him that if he would have the place cleaned up she would try to cook until they could get someone to take charge. The house was given a good cleaning up with the



help of the boys. You should have heard the comments on the first meal served. Really, it did seem good to eat something that at least was not cooked to death and was clean. In a few days a married couple took over the work. By that time our home was finished, and we were glad to be in it.

McHugh and I were sent to work on a well which at that time was about 1100 feet deep. Mr. Frank Good was drilling one shift and his brother, Matt, the other. Matt Good was foreman of the work. Mr. Irwin usually came up every day and went the rounds. I took Matt's place as driller, and McHugh worked with me. At the time I went to work on this well, Mr. Irwin informed me that the tools were stuck and that they had been trying to get them loose for several days. He said to use my judgment as to what was the best thing to do to get out of the difficulty. My shift on the well commenced at twelve midnight. I inquired of Matt Good what had happened so as to be able to work on some theory. He could offer no explanation. I told him that Mr. Irwin had told me to use my judgment and that all I wanted was something to work on, or at least try. He stated that he was in charge of the work there and did not want anyone to interfere or attempt anything without his knowledge. I told him that I could see nothing to do except to continue as had been done for several days. I also remarked that I intended to follow instructions from the superintendent as directed. He left, saying not to make it any worse than it really was then or I would have no job the next day. After he left, McHugh and I thought it best to see what we could do. The tug rope was put on and the walking beam taken down, or rather, instead of keeping the beam going, the engine was used a little just to find the tension on the drilling cable. Good informed me that the cable was O. K., having been in use only a few weeks. I had my helper start the engine going with barely enough steam to lift the weight of the cable and upper half of the tools (jars.) Marking the cable where the hitch was when we came on shift, we found that about fifteen feet of cable came out before the engine took any strain at all. This happened several times showing that there was too much slack cable and that it was not possible to make any strain or motion on the tools. They were stuck and could not be pulled loose. Carefully marking the cable where the strain commenced, we again used the walking beam after lengthening out the stroke on the crank and making another hitch. We shook her up a few times, and to our joy the tools swung loose. When they were withdrawn, we found the drill badly worn and out of gauge which was the cause of them sticking. The drill was removed and a freshly dressed one put on. After pumping out the accumulated drillings and mud, we proceeded to drill again. When the relief came at noon, we had made nearly fifteen feet of new hole. Mr. Irwin came with the relief shift and of course he wanted to know what we had done. I told him all about it in the presence of the other shift. I had no more instructions from Mr. Good. We lived close to their house and were friendly enough as we lived strictly to ourselves. There was just one other woman in the camp, and my



wife visited with her. I sent for my horse and cart which we had left behind. The horse could be used as a saddle or driving horse, and my wife made good use of him.

C. F. McWhittier, whom we always address as "McWhittier," made his first appearance in California in Adams Canyon. He was working at that time for the Horse and Cattle Company. In addition to raising stock, an orange orchard had been set out. McWhittier was a very homesick man and as my wife hailed from the same state, they often exchanged opinions or regrets as well as offering some sort of consoling advice to each other. Later years, of course, gave great credit to McWhittier. He made and lost several fortunes and died a millionaire. Frank A. Garbutt, in one of his daily articles in the *Los Angeles Times*, gave him a beautiful writeup a short time ago. I am also well acquainted with Frank Garbutt and will later have him noted in these pages.

There was no Sunday work, and on Saturday afternoons we would hitch up the horse and drive to Santa Paula to do our shopping. As there was nothing else to do then, we would return to the canyon. On one of our weekly trips, as we were turning on to the main road, a lady hailed us. She said she had often seen us coming out of the canyon and presumed that we were working at the oil wells. I told her that we were and that we came to town on our time off to replenish the larder. She asked us to stop in and see them, put up our horse, and go to town with them after supper. I said that that would make us too late getting home, and then she insisted that we stay the night with them. That is how we became acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. William O'Hara, who were early settlers in Ventura County. Many times we stopped over night with them. They would have been offended if we had not, as theirs was the old-fashioned kind of hospitality.

## NOTES

1. See *Sixty-Three Years In the Oilfields*, by W. E. Youle, Taft, California, 1926.

2. The figure of 53 gravity is based on the old Baumé scale. Production records show that Moody Gulch produced 640 barrels of oil in 1958 with a gravity of 40-45 based on the present A.P.I. standardized method of computation.

3. Pacific Coast Oil Company.

4. Youle does not mention Stein once in his book. The little misunderstanding mentioned here, plus an unpaid loan from Stein to Youle mentioned later, may account for the "oversight."

5. No. 6 well drilled by Thomas R. Bard was the first well in the state to produce in commercial quantities, and was completed in May of 1867.

6. In all, five tunnels were bored into Sulphur Mountain from Adams Canyon. Two of these are still producing oil, the total annual production being about 500 barrels.



## *Membership*

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Philip Bard  
Mrs. Edith Hoffman  
Mrs. Grace Smith  
Mrs. Robert G. Haley  
Walter Wm. Hoffman  
John P. Thille  
Grace S. Thille  
Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Borchard  
Mrs. E. C. Canet

### **SUSTAINING**

Richard Bard  
Roger Edwards  
A. C. Hardison  
Mrs. and Mrs. Milton M. Teague

## *Half a Century of Service*

*Ventura County Mutual Fire Insurance Co.* Organized on April 4, 1898 with E. P. Foster, president; Nathan Blanchard, vice-president and Charles Barnard, secretary. This old Ventura County business firm has faithfully followed the high standards set by its pioneer founders.

*Santa Paula Savings and Loan Association.* Organized in April 1890 as the Santa Paula Building and Loan Association with J. R. Haugh, president; Caspar Taylor, vice-president and H. H. Youngken, secretary. This organization has served the interests of home owners and builders, as well as those of the investor.

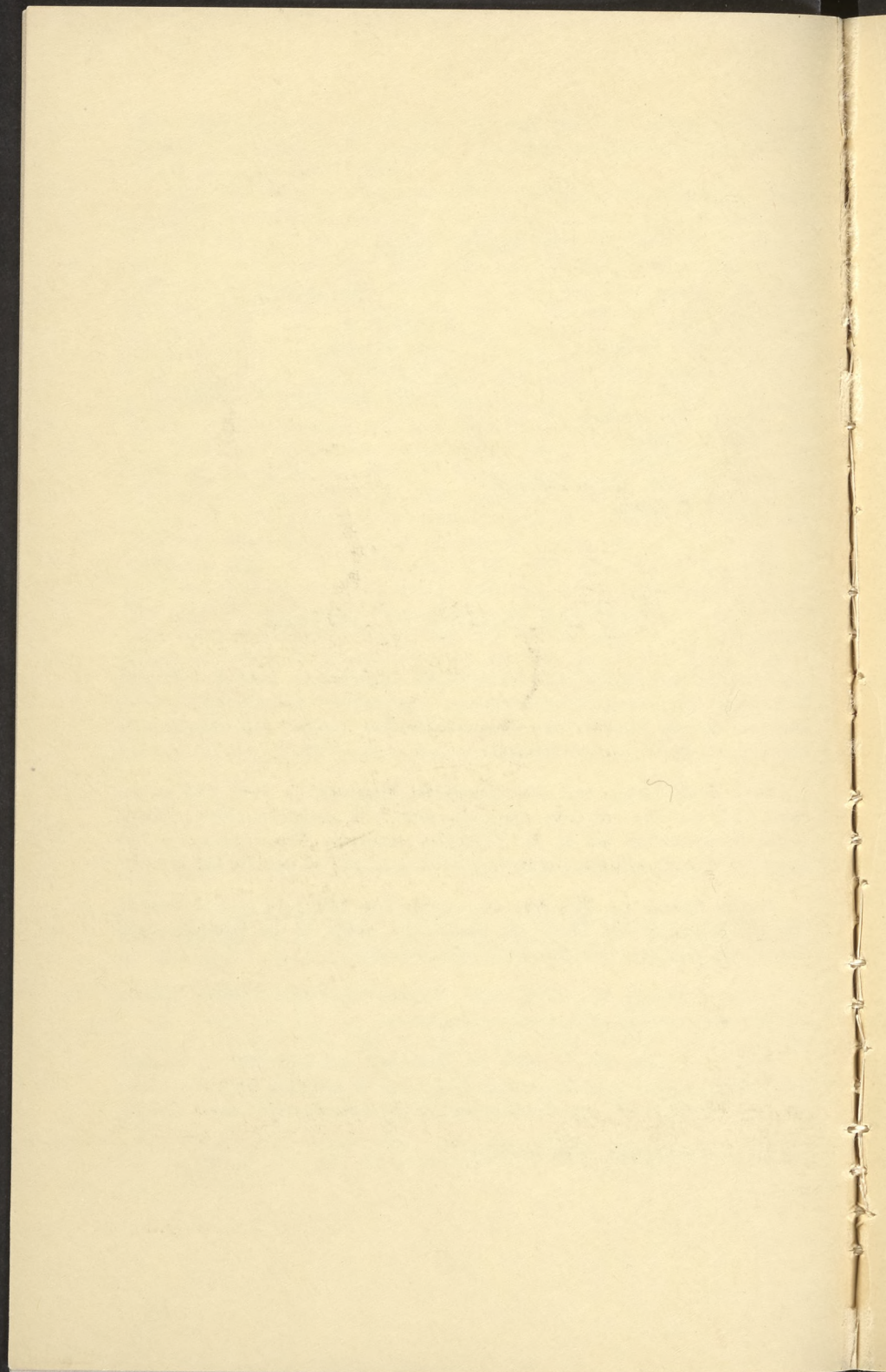
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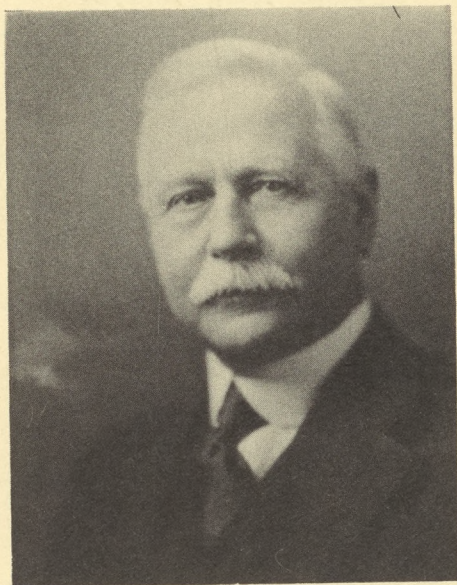
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*The*  
VENTURA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
*QUARTERLY*



CARL E. GRUNSKY

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# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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The Ventura County Historical Society's headquarters is the Pioneer Museum, 77 North California Street, Ventura, California. There are three classes of membership—active, \$5 per year, sustaining, \$25 per year and life, \$100.

The QUARTERLY is published in February, May, August and November from the Society's headquarters at the Pioneer Museum. The editorial staff is composed of Chas. F. Outland, Chairman, Mrs. D. A. Cameron, Mrs. C. R. Nieland, Grant Heil and Robert Pfeiler.

The Society assumes no responsibility for the statements or opinions of authors of various articles. All communications should be addressed to the Society at the Pioneer Museum. Memberships include subscription to the QUARTERLY. Additional copies are available at \$1.00 each.

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# The Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly

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## Water

A simple substance called water has become the most precious and important commodity in the West today. The search for new sources of supply, be it at the state or local level, goes incessantly forward. It pits state against state, north against south, and valley against valley. The more richly endowed areas jealously guard their supply, while those of deficiency attempt to prove that greener pastures over the hills have a surplus that could be put to beneficial use. Neighbors who have never spoken a cross word to one another become adversaries over water. There is actually nothing new about this state of affairs; it is only the pressure of a rapidly expanding population and economy that has accentuated the problem to the boiling point.

Ventura County was once regarded as the best watered county south of the Tehachapis, and it probably still is in comparison with the other southern counties. Artesian wells were a common phenomena on the Oxnard plain and the Las Posas. As late as 1917 Ed. Sheridan wrote of the Simi country: "But when the Simi was divided and sold off and smaller holders began coming in and orchard planting began with diversified crop experiments, exploitation for water was begun and the restless American farmers soon found that what they sought was there in great abundance, and there are now many fine artesian wells on the great ranch." What a difference today, less than half a century later!

The story of the development of water in the western United States will someday be one of the most important subjects about which the historian will have to write. As some small contribution to the cause, the editor of the Quarterly has compiled a short discourse on some of the proposed plans relating to Ventura County that did not materialize. There is no place herein for the expression of biased views on any presently proposed development plans, and the writer has intended none. The projects covered are now an interesting part of our history, and we have tried to treat them as such.



# Historic Water Diversion Proposals

By CHAS. F. OUTLAND

Water in the arid southwest has always been a source of irritation, legal entanglements and disagreements that have, in some cases, degenerated into violence and bloodshed. There is certainly nothing new about the differing opinions in Ventura County at the present time on how best to develop the water resources of the county, or to whom the benefits should accrue.

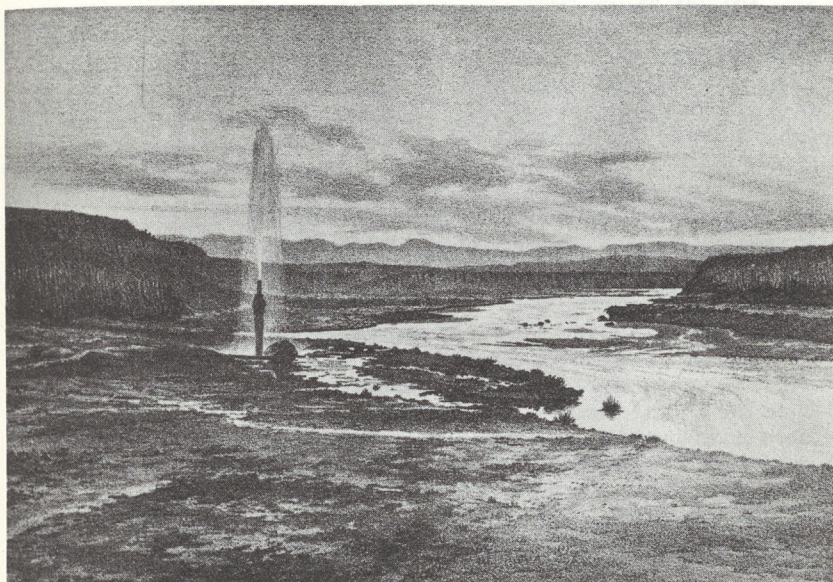
An interested observer once remarked that if all the reports and proposals on the subject were piled in the Sespe, a substantial dam would result from which the waters of that stream could be conserved. Overlooking the obvious facetiousness of the statement, it must be conceded that there have been a myriad such documents compiled over the last half century. In this short dissertation we will confine ourselves to some of those projects whereby it was proposed to take water from one watershed, the Santa Clara River or its tributaries, and transport it to another for the benefit of the population and property owners therein.

The first such plan came from two men who were later to become famous in the field of western water development, J. B. Lippincott and Arthur P. Davis. Mr. Davis was to become Director of the United States Bureau of Reclamation, while Mr. Lippincott played a leading role in the development of the Owens River aqueduct system for the city of Los Angeles. In a letter to Mr. V. M. Freeman dated May 6, 1938 Lippincott describes the plan evolved by Davis and himself:

"For the first time in several weeks I have the opportunity of looking up some of the old data with reference to the surveys that I made on Piru Creek in 1893 and 1894, or some 44 years ago. I have looked over an old report dated September 27, 1894 signed by myself. At that time I had only been in California for some one or two years, and I was a good deal younger man than I am now and far less experienced in water matters than I hope I am at present. However, my report now appears to me to be quite amateurish. I trust you will keep this in mind when you read the following memorandum.

"Mr. Arthur P. Davis was at that time a topographer in the United States Geological Survey. He came to California to start the topographic mapping in Southern California and brought me as an assistant. I worked with him about a year in that capacity and then left the Geological Survey in order to go into private practice. My first irrigation job was with the Bear Valley Irrigation Company at Redlands. That company at that time was starting to build a large canal line from the Santa Ana River to the Perris and Alessandro country. Mr. William Hammon Hall, former state engineer, was the Chief Engineer of the enterprise. This company went pretty much on the rocks and stopped paying wages, and I had to look for another job. This was during a period of depression. Mr. Davis and I made a cruise through the Antelope





Las Posas artesian well, 1883

“ . . . exploitation for water was begun and the restless American farmers soon found what they sought was there in great abundance . . . ”

Valley, the headwaters of Piru Creek and the country around Fort Tejon and Castaic Lake.

“At that time the Antelope Valley was being quite rapidly settled with colonists who were going into the production of almonds, pears and peaches with a very limited local water supply. Mr. Davis and I found three reservoir sites that interested us. One was at the junction of Piru Creek and Lockwood Creek which had a very fair storage capacity and where the flash floods of Piru Creek could be regulated. The drainage basin above this site was 160 square miles. Another favorable site was found at Lockwood Creek. These two reservoirs could be used to regulate the flood flows of Piru Creek to the proposed capacity of a diversion canal leading to a reservoir site at the head of Antelope Valley which was then called Crane Lake, and which is now called I believe Quail Lake. This would afford storage for the flood waters diverted through the diversion canal.

“It was proposed that only the winter flood waters of Piru Creek would be so diverted. It was also possible by means of a tunnel to divert these Piru Creek waters into Castaic Lake at the head of Tejon Creek in case it was desired to irrigate the lands around the southern limits of the San Joaquin Valley instead of Antelope Valley.



"As far as the reservoirs were concerned the facilities for controlling flood waters were excellent. The Piru Creek reservoir with a dam 589 feet long and a height of 120 feet would have a capacity of 9,035 acre feet. The Lockwood Creek dam 445.5 feet long and 125 feet high would have a capacity of 14,857 acre feet. These two would be the regulating reservoirs on the stream. It was proposed to build a diversion canal starting some six miles below the junction of Piru and Lockwood creeks, the diversion canal to have a capacity of 240 second feet. At Crane Lake a dam 37 feet high would give 25,893 acre feet storage capacity. If 52 feet high, 40,408 acre feet; if 79 feet high, 55,375 acre feet. The Castaic Lake reservoir if 30 feet high would have a capacity of 21,000 acre feet; if 71 feet high, 50,872 acre feet.

"I maintained a tent camp in the regions referred to for something over a year, surveyed the reservoir sites, the canal diversion line, making a complete topographic map of the alignment, obtained permits from the United States Land Office for the use of the reservoir sites, and actually started construction of one of the tunnels. My very good wife ran the camp for me, doing the cooking, and we lived throughout the winter in those mountains in a tent with a baby girl some two years of age. At the time it did not appear to us that we were enduring any particular hardships, but looking back at it I often wonder how my wife stood for it.

"Mr. Davis and I organized a corporation called the Antelope Valley Water Company. We associated with ourselves an old friend, Senator Leroy A. Wright of San Diego, and one or two other men of some means. The depression that occurred about 1894 got the best of us. I stayed with the work until I remember giving my wife the last dollar I had. What was worse than the depression was the extreme drought that followed the making of these surveys. The period from about 1895 until 1904 experienced the worst drought that Southern California has ever seen within its history. We were maintaining gaging stations on the stream and were 'hoist by our own petard.' That is, the records of stream flow that we made demonstrated that the water supply was inadequate. In those days we knew far less about water crop of our southwestern mountains than we do now. It is very fortunate for two reasons that we did not succeed in our enterprise. First, the water supply would have been inadequate to carry out our plans; and second, the litigation which probably would have followed the building of the reservoirs of Piru Creek would very likely have prohibited the enterprise.

"I cannot say that I have ever regretted the effort that was made and I never heard a word of complaint from Mr. Davis or any of our other associates. I do believe that the two reservoir sites that we found on Piru Creek have some real value, and that some day either one or both should be built. If you care to have me do so I can send you my report written in 1904 for you to go into more detail. Very truly yours, J. B. Lippincott."



The Davis-Lippincott idea was interesting enough in itself, not only because of its early date but also because it proposed to transport water out of Ventura County. However, the really intriguing thought for anyone familiar with water development at that time is contained in the last sentence of the Lippincott letter. For whom was he writing a report on the waters of the Piru ten years after the depression in 1894 forced abandonment of the original plan? It will be recalled that in 1904 Mr. Lippincott was supervising engineer in California for the United States Reclamation Service. At that time the bureau was busily at work in the Owens Valley, presumably surveying and making final plans for the construction of a great reclamation project to develop the water resources of the region for a vast agricultural empire. At the same time the city of Los Angeles was frantically searching for an additional water supply to augment their dangerously depleted sources close to home. One of the streams known to have been studied by Los Angeles, at least in a preliminary way, was Piru Creek. The Piru could not begin to yield the water necessary for the southern metropolis, but the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power is the only conceivable party for whom the report referred to in Lippincott's letter could have been made.

W. A. Chalfant in his book, *The Story of Inyo*, (second edition) is unmerciful toward Lippincott, accusing the latter of being an employee for Los Angeles at the same time he was representing the United States government in the Owens Valley. The inference is quite plain that the engineer sold out the people of the valley for the city of Los Angeles. Chalfant presents an almost unimpeachable case, quoting from original letters and documents to prove his point. The entire mess became so unsavory that it resulted in the retirement of Mr. Lippincott from the service of the United States government in 1906. He was immediately hired by the "water seekers" of Los Angeles. If half the charges brought to bear by Chalfant were true, the wonder is not that Lippincott was "hoist by our own petard" on the Piru, but that he was not hung from a cottonwood on the Owens!

The return of abundant rainfall in 1905 brought to a halt any water development plans that may have been in some southern California minds. Nothing so quickly loses its allure as the neighbor's rainwater tank in a wet year. It was not until 1924 that serious drought conditions again developed; and it was at this time two important projects were proposed that were to have far reaching significance, even though neither ever reached the construction stage. The first was a plan by a group of Ojai citizens to build a dam at the Cold Springs site on the upper Sespe Creek and bring water into the Ojai Valley by means of a diversion canal and two short tunnels. The second was far more ambitious, calling for no less than three dams and three power-houses on Sespe Creek, and an aqueduct to transport water to the Moorpark-Conejo area. The dam sites for this second project were at Cold Springs, Topa Topa, and Hammel. It will be noted that the two projects



were incompatible with each other, at least insofar as the Cold Springs dam site was concerned.

By coincidence, the engineer to make the preliminary surveys and draw up tentative plans for the Ojai group was none other than J. B. Lippincott, the man who thirty years before had proposed to divert water out of the Santa Clara watershed into the Antelope Valley. In May of 1925 Mr. Lippincott submitted his report on *Source of Water Supply and Proposed Irrigation System for the Ojai Valley*. It was suggested that a dam 180 feet high be built at the Cold Springs site, such a dam to store 50,000 acre feet of water from which a safe annual yield of 10,000 acre feet was anticipated. Like most irrigation development projects of that day, Lippincott proposed paying for part of the cost by utilizing the water for hydroelectric generation:

"It is possible to divert the waters from this reservoir to a point immediately above the Ojai District by the construction of two tunnels aggregating 2- $\frac{1}{2}$  miles in length and 5.7 miles of open conduit. The elevation of the lower end of this conduit will be approximately 3,200 feet, over 2,000 feet above the upper edge of the Ojai Valley. It is planned to utilize this difference in elevation for the generation of hydroelectric power . . . With an annual draft from the reservoir of 10,000 acre feet, approximately 15 million kilowatt hours per annum can be generated at this plant. Such a block of power delivered 100% every year with no reduction during the most severe drought would be particularly valuable. We estimate that it could be wholesaled to some existing power company for seven mills gross per kilowatt at the switchboard of the powerhouse. At this rate the annual revenue from the power generated would be \$105,000, which would be 6% on \$1,750,000."

After leaving the powerhouse, the water entered a diversion system that carried it to all parts of the Ojai Valley. Lippincott estimated the total cost for this phase of the development at \$3,262,705. This included the dam at Cold Springs, tunnels and diversion conduit, penstock and powerhouse.

A secondary development to be carried out at a later date called for the building of a dam 180 feet high on the location of the present Matilija Dam. The estimated cost was slightly over \$700,000. Little if any opposition was foreseen from holders of riparian water rights on either the Ventura River or Sespe Creek. Lippincott states:

"The diversion of the waters from the Sespe Creek does not contemplate any interference with the summer flow of that stream. The winter water stored in the reservoir and diverted to the Ojai Valley will be a conservation of flood waters which are now wasting into the sea. The development of Matilija Creek as herein outlined will not interfere with the available water supply for lower users on that stream. In fact the flow should be improved rather than impaired."

There was trouble from another source, however:

"The rights of the proposed Ojai District to utilize the Cold Springs Reservoir as outlined above, are complicated by the application of

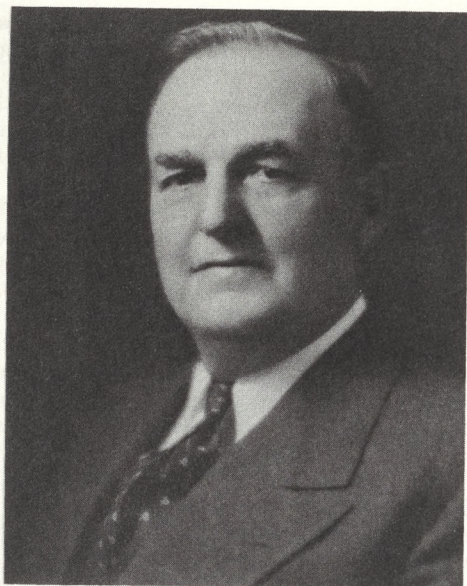


other parties to utilize this water and reservoir site in a more general project for both irrigation and power. The Sespe Light and Power Company organized a long number of years past, proposed the construction of reservoirs in the basin of Piru Creek as well as three reservoirs in the basin of the Sespe. It is claimed that this is a private corporation. Their stock has been broadly offered for sale throughout the state and their efforts so far have not passed the promotion stage. This company has made applications both before the State Division of Water Rights and the Federal Power Commission. These rights have not yet been granted. Because their program contemplates much greater storage control and more remote diversions than in the case of the proposed Ojai project, the effect of their development is regarded by some of the people of the Santa Clara Valley as a possible menace to their ground water conditions. Efforts have been made to reach some understanding with this power and irrigation company, but the status of their alleged rights is so vague and uncertain that it has not been feasible for them to present a definite proposition either for their relinquishment of any claim that they may have to the Cold Springs Reservoir or the delivery of water therefrom to the District."

Mr. Lippincott was apparently unaware that by 1924 the old Sespe Light and Power Company was no longer in existence, at least under that name. By then it had become known as the Ventura Power Company (not to be confused with the earlier Ventura County Power Company) but the name change did nothing to enhance the sale of the stock so earnestly desired by the San Francisco interests behind the scheme. The words of Lippincott, "so vague and uncertain" are perfectly applied to this company. The engineering claims as to water yields are so exorbitantly high that one is left with the impression that sale of stock may have been the motivating force for its existence. Almost half a million acre feet of water on the average was claimed to be wasting into the Pacific Ocean from the Santa Clara! The Ventura Power Company, of course, was primarily interested in power development; but negotiations were under way with persons who were endeavoring to organize what was to be known as the Moorpark-Conejo Irrigation District for the sale of Sespe water to that district. Mr. Edward Bowen, Consulting Engineer, sums up the water diversion project in his *Report Upon Irrigation System For the Moorpark-Conejo Irrigation District*:

"The water supply for the Moorpark-Conejo Irrigation District is derived from the excess water yield of the Santa Clara watershed. The diversion is to be made from Sespe Creek. There are approximately 21,000 acres of irrigable land under the proposed canals of the Moorpark-Conejo Irrigation District, and approximately 4,000 acres of additional lands above the canals. These lands at the higher elevations may subsequently be served with water by pumping from the main canal. The use of water, however, will be substantially less on these rougher lands than the general average use over the valley lands. The average annual demand for water by the irrigation district may be about 30,000 acre feet.





Charles C. Teague

Mr. Teague helped organize and was president of the Santa Clara River Protective Association

"The available water supply from the Santa Clara River watershed has been studied in detail and reported upon to the Organization Committee of the Moorpark-Conejo Irrigation District by the firm of Olmsted & Gilpin, members of the American Society of Civil Engineers, and Mr. Hyde Forbes, Associate Member of the American Society of Civil Engineers. This report ably studies in great detail the water crop and present uses in the Santa Clara River Valley. The conclusion drawn is that in general the average waste is over 400,000 acre feet of water and that an ample water supply for the proposed Moorpark-Conejo Irrigation District can be made available from the flow of Sespe Creek without encroachment upon stream flow necessary to meet the irrigation requirements of the Santa Clara River area."

The entire feasibility of the project, however, was based upon the success of the Ventura Power Company. The Moorpark-Conejo group did not propose to build dams on the Sespe, nor were they in any financial position to do so. Bowen sums up this phase of the problem with these words:

"Providing satisfactory arrangements can be made with the power interests in the development of the water supply in the Upper Sespe, I am convinced that the District is entirely feasible. It is well conceived, can be accomplished at a reasonable cost, and will add enormously to the wealth of the District."



The Forbes report referred to above represents one of the most optimistic water development studies ever made of the Santa Clara River. The estimates of water yields are so obviously excessive that one immediately starts searching for the reasons. It is known that Forbes used erroneous figures from one rainfall station in computing the probable runoff from the Santa Clara. He also concedes that in compiling much of his data he has made frequent reference to the figures developed by the engineers for the Ventura Power Company—figures that had been compiled primarily during, and immediately after, a period of high average rainfall. It must be remembered, too, that there had been no accurate stream gaging over any extended period of time and that all of the engineers studying the possibilities of water development on the Santa Clara River were working at a distinct disadvantage. Forbes, like Bowen, notes the necessity of the Ventura Power Company to the success of the proposed Moorpark-Conejo district:

"The Ventura Power Company and its predecessors have long considered the development of a water supply for the purpose of generating power from the Santa Clara River tributary drainage area. Through its president, Mr. A. B. Schindler, it has signified its willingness to join with the proposed Irrigation District in the development of storage, if and when an organization is affected, and discuss such a development, make necessary surveys and investigations jointly, and enter into agreement with a duly elected Board of Directors authorized to act for said District. Necessarily costs will largely consist of that incident to storage and cannot be estimated in advance of negotiations with the Ventura Power Company or the consideration of some other power development—in other words, a determination of the proportion of cost which can be charged off to power development . . .

"The plans of the Ventura Power Company embody the sale of stored water to the Moorpark-Conejo Irrigation District at the intake of its pipe line above Hammel Reservoir. If the District can so acquire its water supply at a satisfactory price all question of the construction and maintenance of the storage features will be eliminated.

"On the other hand the writer is not informed as to the financial responsibility of the Ventura Power Company or its ability to carry out its program of construction. Should it prove that the company is unable to carry through with its plans, it might still be possible and financially feasible for the District to produce water through storage to satisfy its irrigation demands and produce power which will recompense it for the added expenditures. The financing of such a development, however, is questionable unless it can be established that a power contract is good security for bonds. Such a contract could be secured as there is a ready market for power through the Southern California Edison Company."

After leaving the intake above Hammel Dam, the proposed supply conduit, with a capacity of 70 second feet, crossed to the east bank of the Sespe and continued downstream to a point in back of Fillmore.



It then crossed the Santa Clara Valley in an inverted syphon to a grade elevation on the south side of the valley where it entered a short tunnel piercing the crest of the mountains. The south portal of the tunnel was the terminus of the supply conduit and the beginning of the distribution system. The supply conduit would have consisted of 7.4 miles of steel pipe, and 10.6 miles of concrete bench flume. A map of the distribution system enclosed with Forbes' report shows the system ending in the region of Newbury Park. The total estimated cost for the project was \$2,316,000. This, of course, did not include any funds for the construction of dams.

Forbes overestimated the water yield of the Santa Clara River, but he woefully underestimated the thinking and feelings of the land-owners of the valley when he wrote:

"The prior claimants do not protest the formation of your proposed district nor do they object to the storage of flood waters. In fact they would welcome storage upon the watershed as a protection against flood menace and conservation of large volumes of water now wasted. Their main concern is whether or not the extensive underground reservoir, from which they now derive an irrigation supply sufficient in rate and availability at all times to meet demand, would be depleted by diversion from Sespe Creek."

The truth of the matter was that the "prior claimants" were so concerned about the combined Ventura Power Company and Moorpark-Conejo projects that they organized what was known as the Santa Clara River Protective Association. The agreement into which they entered states their objectives quite clearly:

"THIS AGREEMENT made and entered into as of the 25th day of January 1925, between all of the subscribers hereto, each subscriber subscribing hereto in consideration of the others subscribing hereto, WITNESSETH:

"That an association to be known as and called SANTA CLARA RIVER PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION, composed of the subscribers hereto is hereby created.

"The purposes of the association shall be to investigate the surface or underground waters of the Santa Clara River and its tributaries, and the territory adjacent thereto; to take such steps as may seem necessary or advisable to protect the water supply of the Santa Clara River and its tributaries, and to prevent the removal of such waters to points outside the water shed of said river and its tributaries."

The executive committee set up to administer affairs until an election of officers could be held consisted of C. C. Teague, president; George B. Travis, secretary; A. C. Hardison; Charles Donlon; J. B. McNabb; D. Felsenthal; Walter Duval; Howard Pressey; and George C. Power.

The Protective Association was entirely a voluntary organization, with necessary operating funds being raised through a per acreage assessment of the members. A few years after the organization of this group, a formal water district known as the Santa Clara Water Con-



servation District was voted into being by the landowners of the area involved. Some twenty years later this district in turn became the present United Water Conservation District. It will be readily apparent that the United district traces its origins directly to the water diversion plans of the mid-1920's.

The first order of business for the Protective Association was to retain an engineer to survey the watershed and report on the effects the proposed projects of water diversion would have on the water supply of the valley. It was felt that several local men were qualified to undertake the survey; but apparently a legal fight was anticipated, for the association retained one of the outstanding engineers living at that time, C. E. Grunsky of San Francisco.

Carl Ewald Grunsky was born in San Joaquin County, California in 1855. After an extensive education, including several years in Europe, he began his career as a topographer with a river survey crew. Mr. Grunsky was City Engineer for San Francisco from 1900 to 1904; a member of the Isthmian Canal Commission, 1904-1905; and consulting engineer for the United States Reclamation Service, 1905-1907. As Senior Member of C. E. Grunsky Company, he specialized in irrigation, sewage, and drainage problems. A brilliant engineer, and a gentleman in every respect of the word, Mr. Grunsky was ideally suited to undertake the survey of the Santa Clara River watershed. What was even more important to some was the weight his testimony would carry if matters over water rights developed into a hearing before the State Water Rights Board or court action.

The conclusions of Mr. Grunsky were submitted to the Santa Clara River Protective Association in July, 1925 in his *Report on the Water Resources of the Santa Clara Valley*. Needless to say, Mr. Grunsky's estimates of water yields in the basin were much more conservative than those of Messrs. Lippincott, Bowen, and Forbes. In light of present knowledge, however, even these conservative estimates seem somewhat on the optimistic side. For example, in years in which the rainfall was 150-190% of average, the runoff on the Piru was computed by Grunsky at 150,000-280,000 acre feet. The winter of 1957-58 falls within this rainfall zone, but the actual measured runoff was only 92,580 acre feet. In years when the rainfall was from 60-70% of average, Mr. Grunsky computes the runoff of the Piru from 17,000-25,000 acre feet. The winters of 1955-56 and 1956-57 fall roughly within this range, but the actual measured runoff was 10,850 and 9,610 acre feet respectively. Once again it should be noted that the engineers of that period had very little in the way of accurate stream gauging data with which to work. It should also be noted that the present gauging station on Piru Creek is above Santa Felicia Dam and that some 13% of the drainage area is downstream from this point.

Mr. Grunsky's opinion on diversion of water from the Santa Clara River watershed was quite clear and to the point:

"Concerning the other question as to whether there is water which could be conserved by storage and conveyed out of the Santa Clara



River watershed without damage to valley interests, it should be assumed for the present that this cannot be done. There have been in the past, and there will again be in the future, long series of years in which the entire water production of the Santa Clara River watershed falls below the amount of water which should be available for satisfactory irrigation of the valley lands. This amount if taken at 2 acre feet per annum for 84,000 acres of land will be 168,000 acre feet per annum. In the years in which water production falls below this amount, there will be a draft upon the subsurface water supply in excess of any possible natural replenishment. This underground supply may be regarded as water in storage. Any draft in excess of replenishment will lower the water table. To what extent replenishment of depleted gravels will follow in a single or in a series of wet seasons cannot now be determined. This, it may be assumed, will develop in the near future because the rapidly increasing draft on the subsurface waters will unquestionably lower the water table in some amount during irrigation seasons, and it will soon be known at what rate this replenishment takes place under various conditions of stream flow."

In his summary of Findings and Recommendations Mr. Grunsky makes these points:

"Any diversion of water to regions outside of the drainage basin of the river or beyond the area underlaid with gravels fed by the river's water should be considered detrimental to valley interests until experience determines whether or not there are any means of conserving some of the water not required for those areas and therefore recognized as waste waters . . .

"Applications for permits to construct storage reservoirs on the Sespe and Piru creeks and to utilize water for the generation of power together with other applications indicating an intent to divert some water from the drainage basin into the Moorpark district are pending in the office of the Division of Water Rights of the State Department of Public Works. If the permits to store water on these creeks are granted, the claim will, no doubt, be made that some of the waters retained in the reservoirs are waste waters and subject to diversion out of the drainage basin of the river. It will be difficult and at times impossible to determine the fact as to the amount of such waters. The amount therefore which could not be beneficially used in the Santa Clara Valley will be very small. Unless such storage reservoirs are constructed in cooperation with the water users of the valley their existence is likely to lead to controversies and to litigation. They may prove a menace rather than a benefit . . .

"Based on present information there will be no surplus water available for diversion away from the main valley and the Oxnard region, except in the occasional seasons of unusual heavy rainfall and no means are apparent for making such surplus useful away from the valley without detriment to the interests of the Santa Clara River region."



One final objection to the diversion plans of the Moorpark-Conejo group should be noted:

"Reference is also made to pending projects which might effect the interests of the valley adversely, attention being called to the fact that utilization of any reservoir space for the storage of water to be diverted to lands near Moorpark or to lands in the Ojai Valley would involve a reduction of the relatively scant reservoir capacity that will probably some day be required to regulate the flow of the Sespe and Piru creeks in the interest of the valley land owners."

The Grunsky Report is one of the more interesting and readable studies on a subject where the authors, of necessity perhaps, tend to be highly technical and boring. There is one sentence written by Mr. Grunsky which should always remain uppermost in the minds of those seeking outside sources of water, or by those in areas of claimed surplus: "It will be difficult and at times impossible to determine the fact as to the amount of such (surplus) waters." Here in one sentence is the very core of most friction over water development where diversion out of the area of origin is involved.

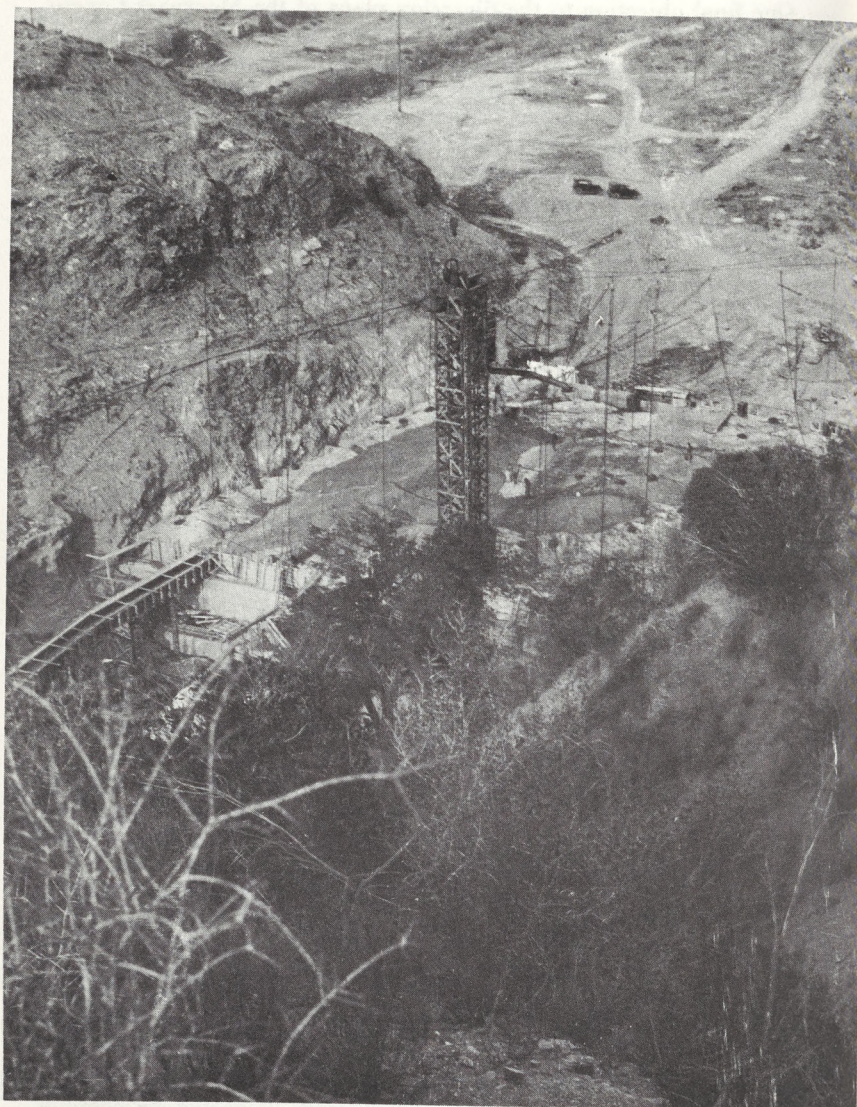
One final project should be studied, although the diversion of water from the Santa Clara River was a minor aspect of the plan and possibly even an afterthought. Because of the prominent part he later played in the historic case, we will once more quote from the Grunsky Report:

"Los Angeles is at present constructing a massive high concrete dam on San Francisquito Creek at a point where it will command 38 square miles of the watershed of this creek. It is understood that the purpose of this dam is to create a reservoir which is to assist in equalizing the flow of the Los Angeles aqueduct. Utilization thereby, of the waters of San Francisquito Creek is not contemplated. But this dam is so located that it can intercept and divert the major portion of this creek's flow out of the Santa Clara River watershed, and its outflow works will control the future flow down the San Francisquito Creek. In consequence of this situation an agreement should be entered into with Los Angeles to the effect that the operation of the reservoir works will be such at all times as not to affect injuriously the interests of the Santa Clara River Valley.

"It is believed that without interference with the purpose for which the reservoir is constructed Los Angeles could hold in this reservoir the winter flow of the creek for release in the months it will do the most good in Santa Clara River. Nor would it be too much to expect to have some water held over in the reservoir from seasons of large production to others of small water production. It should be possible to reach some agreement with Los Angeles on this point which would justify operation and above all do away with any requirement of continual measurement as would be the case if undisturbed stream flow at all times were insisted on."

Subsequent events make this suggestion on the St. Francis Dam appear almost naive. Certainly it does not seem plausible that Mr.





Pouring the foundation for disaster

The St. Francis Dam as seen by C. E. Grunsky in March of 1925. Serious leakage later developed along the line of indentation to the left and slightly above the tower.



Grunsky would have made such a broad statement without first consulting with William Mulholland or some other responsible member of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. It is known that Mr. Grunsky was on friendly terms with the "Chief," as Mulholland was affectionately called in the department; and the logical surmise is that the latter had assured Mr. Grunsky that there was no intent on the part of Los Angeles to store the waters of San Francisquito Creek. In another part of his report Mr. Grunsky again refers to the dam and states: "It is understood that Los Angeles does not propose to use any of the Creek's waters to the detriment of valley interests." Less than two months later Los Angeles formally filed an application with the Division of Water Rights, and an amended application filed July 14, 1926 specifically requests appropriation of San Francisquito flood and surplus waters to the city of Los Angeles.

The tardy application by Los Angeles makes their original intent in the matter somewhat vague. Possibly they had always planned to appropriate those San Francisquito waters, or perhaps they felt it would be simpler to have clear title to them than to be forced to periodically gauge the flow of the creek and release an equivalent amount from storage in the dam.

One can not help but ponder the consequences if an agreement such as Mr. Grunsky outlined in his report had been made by the Protective Association with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Assuming that the department had agreed to store the flood waters of the canyon for the benefit of Santa Clara Valley landowners at a later date, then it would follow that such stored water behind the dam was the property of those landowners through an agreement made by their own Protective Association. Under such circumstances, would they then have been responsible for their share of the damage and lost lives that resulted from the bursting of the dam in March of 1928?

No such agreement was forthcoming, however. On the contrary, the filing of the application by Los Angeles was vigorously protested by the property owners and water companies in the Santa Clara Valley and by most of the landowners of San Francisquito Canyon. The formal hearing on the application was held in Los Angeles in 1926 with the Honorable Edward Hyatt, Jr., presiding. The case developed along classic lines. The position of the protestants was simply stated:

"The flow of the creek and river during the winter season serves to replenish the water of the San Francisquito Creek bed and the Santa Clara Valley; and that the impounding by the city of the waters of San Francisquito Creek by means of its reservoir will have the effect of preventing the underground flow and seepage of the Santa Clara River and its tributary, San Francisquito Creek, from being annually replenished, and that protestants will thus be deprived of sufficient amounts of water for beneficial agricultural uses and domestic purposes."

The case for Los Angeles was as simply stated:

"To these protests the city of Los Angeles answered that the construction of the dam would not cause any interference with the rights





Engineers mark the farthest point reached by the released water of St. Francis Reservoir during the test of September 15-18, 1926. The water lacked some 200 feet of reaching the Santa Clara River.

of the protestants herein for the reason the application contemplates the storage of flood and surplus waters only."

At this point presiding officer Hyatt suggested an interesting experiment to settle the question. He proposed that a rigidly controlled flow of water be released from the newly completed St. Francis Dam and that engineers be stationed along the creek at pre-determined locations to measure the flow, time of arrival, and other pertinent data. From this test Mr. Hyatt reasoned a fairly accurate determination could be made as to how much water actually permeated into the underground water gravels of the canyon and the Santa Clara River basin. William Mulholland was apparently so sure of his case that he readily agreed to Hyatt's proposal and emphasized the point by sarcastically remarking that the engineers should be equipped with fast horses inasmuch as the water would travel down the canyon and valley so swiftly it would be necessary for them to have some means of keeping up with it.

The test attracted wide attention and interest among water engineers around the state, and considerable preparatory work was done to insure an accurate and fair performance. Harold Conkling, hydraulic engineer for the State Division of Water Rights, outlined the tentative procedure:



"One hundred second feet will be discharged from reservoir beginning at 6 a.m. September 15, 1926. A representative of the city and a representative of one of the protestants will together read the gauge at the weir at half-hour intervals after flow is regulated and note the gauge readings. A hydrographer will meter the discharge at Harry Carey's bridge and at the most feasible point near the mouth of the creek. After the 100 second feet of discharge has been allowed to flow long enough to determine whether it will reach the mouth of the creek, discharge will be varied as the results demand. Each new discharge will be held long enough so that the flow will become steady at the lower end and give opportunity for several measurements."

The test got under way on schedule before a capacity audience of distinguished engineers. Los Angeles alone was represented by eleven engineers and two attorneys. By 7:00 a.m. the flow had been regulated at 100.5 cubic feet per second, where it was held until 11:00 a.m. of the following day. At this time it was increased to 153.10 cubic feet per second. The test continued until 5:50 a.m. of September 18th, at which time the gates were closed. A total of 775.28 acre feet of water was released; but not one drop ever reached the Santa Clara River, the entire amount being absorbed by the water gravels of San Francisquito Canyon! It is doubtful if any of the participants in this famous experiment had remotely anticipated such conclusive results. Far from needing fast horses to keep up with the water, as Mr. Mulholland had suggested would be the case, the engineers involved had a hard time amusing themselves waiting for its arrival.

No decision was ever handed down on the application of Los Angeles to appropriate the waters of San Francisquito Canyon. The hearings were completed, but the failure of the dam occurred before the water board rendered its judgment. Most observers felt the results of the water test had given the Santa Clara Valley interests a clear cut edge in the case.

The fight for water continues, at times more bitterly than before. It seems ironic that of all the proposals discussed the only one to progress beyond the planning stage was the St. Francis Dam of the city of Los Angeles. Two years and 13 days after water was first stored behind that great concrete arch, it failed with dramatic suddenness causing one of the worst disasters in the history of the state.



## Judicial Murder

*The opinion of Judge John W. Armstrong in the case of F. A. Sprague, convicted of first degree murder for the killing of T. W. More in March, 1877.*

EXPLANATORY NOTE: The recent furor over the Chessman case has recalled to the minds of several oldtimers the equally famous case of F. A. Sprague in the 1880's. There was no similarity in the crimes that sent both men to San Quentin under sentence of death, but in each instance public sentiment for and against the death penalty reached monumental proportions.

Sprague, together with seven other men, was accused of the murder of Thomas Wallace More of the Sespe on the night of March 24, 1877. Almost a year had elapsed between the slaying and the arrest and indictment of Sprague and his companions. The defendants elected to have separate trials. Sprague was tried first, convicted and sentenced to death. The second defendant, John Curlee, was also convicted but received a sentence of life imprisonment. At the trial of the third man, John S. Churchill, the State's chief witness completely reversed his testimony of the two previous trials throwing the entire case into an uproar. Churchill was acquitted. Curlee was brought back from San Quentin where he was serving his life term, and the prosecution entered a nolle prosequi in his case as well as those of the remaining defendants. Sprague, however, remained in San Quentin under sentence of death. With all of the other defendants freed, public sentiment began to swing toward Sprague. Petitions were widely circulated throughout Ventura County asking for his release or commutation of his sentence to life imprisonment. As in the Chessman case great pressure was brought to bear on the Governor of California to act. Governor Stoneman, in order to have a more learned opinion upon which to reach a decision, requested Superior Judge John W. Armstrong to review the case and advise him in the matter. The letter printed here is taken from the original copy sent to Stoneman by the Judge. This important historical document, as well as other interesting material on the Sprague case, was recently donated to the Pioneer Museum by a grandson of Sprague.

Sprague served five years in prison and was finally pardoned in 1886. He returned to Ventura County where he lived for some ten years, after which he went to Mexico where he died.



Sacramento November 9, 1883

His Excellency Gov. George Stoneman  
Dear Sir:

Your letter of the 8th. inst. has been received and in compliance with your request for my legal opinion I have read and fully considered the evidence in the case of the People Vs. F. A. Sprague submitted to me by you. I give it as my opinion that there is not sufficient legal evidence of his guilt; except the testimony of his accomplices, and upon such evidence alone the law will not permit a conviction. For your information I quote Section 1111 of the Penal Code: It is as follows: "A conviction cannot be had on the testimony of an accomplice, unless he is corroborated by other evidence which *in itself* and without the aid of the testimony of the accomplice, tends to connect the defendant with the commission of the offense; and the corroboration is not sufficient if it merely shows the offense or the circumstances thereof." If Austin Brown told the truth as to his conversation with the defendant he was an accomplice; People Vs. (illegible) 53 Cal. 604. If he did not tell the truth as to the conversation with the defendant he could know nothing about the connection of the defendant with the murder of Moore (sic) as he did not claim to have any knowledge other than such as he obtained in the supposed conversation. From a careful examination of his testimony it will be seen to bear upon it the impress of falsehood. The next witness who assumes to connect Sprague with the murder was Nimrod H. Hickerson but he was an accomplice (see transcript, p. 49) and his testimony is affected with the same legal infirmity (sic) as that of Austin Brown — but he had died before the trial was held. At the trial, a paper called his deposition was read in evidence.

A conviction of a capital offense and an execution of a defendant thereunder would be nothing less than a judicial murder. At the common law it was the right of the accused to have all witnesses both for and against him examined orally in open court in the presence of the jury — People Vs. Dray 6 Cal, 250 — and this right could only be taken away by statute. The common law rule had been modified at the time of the trial in this case by sections 686 and 869 of the Penal Code; but the paper read in evidence did not conform to those sections and it follows that the paper was not competent evidence. It was not taken by question and answer in the presence of the defendant with objections noted, nor certified as required by those sections — but this has been decided to be necessary. Those sections must have been carefully complied with to make a deposition competent — The People Vs. (illegible) 54 Cal, — 575. The deposition of Hickerson must be treated as *entirely* out of the case for the reasons given; but in view of the circumstances under which the deposition was made it must be regarded with distrust. The witness Jesse Jones was at the trial fully impeached as the record shows — his character for honesty and integrity was shown to be bad.



That the impeaching witnesses told the truth is evident from the sequel—it appears that he afterwards retracted all he had sworn to against Sprague. In conclusion allow me to say that after a careful examination of all the evidence in this case, if I had ever had doubt as to the wisdom of vesting in the Executive the pardoning power, this would have removed this doubt. This case does not only show the necessity for the extension of the power but the propriety of its exercise.

Very Respectfully

(signed) JOHN W. ARMSTRONG,  
Superior Judge



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**VENTURA  
COUNTY  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
QUARTERLY**

**November 1960**



# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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*Edward and Estelle Doheny  
Memorial Issue*

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The Venters County





# Edward and Estelle Doheny

By LUCILLE V. MILLER\*

A few miles north of Camarillo, on a sunny hilltop rising above the orange and walnut groves along Somis Road, stands a graceful, white-colonnaded building known as the Edward Laurence Doheny Memorial Library. This library, which is a part of St. John's Seminary (the major seminary of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles), is the home of one of California's outstanding cultural treasures — the Estelle Doheny Collection of Manuscripts, Rare Books and Objects of Art. The jewel-like building with its priceless collections was given to the Seminary by Carrie Estelle Doheny, who died in 1958; and it symbolizes, in an especially beautiful and meaningful way, her devotion to her husband and her Church.

Carrie Estelle Betzold was born in Philadelphia on August 2, 1875. Her parents, John E. and Susan Betzold, were of German extraction. In 1876 they moved to Marshalltown, Iowa, where a second daughter, Daysie May, was born. Mrs. Betzold, who was a meticulous housekeeper and a good cook, brought up her daughters to follow her example of hard work and careful management.

About 1890, when Estelle was in her teens, they moved again, this time to Los Angeles. Their first home was a frame cottage near the corner of Sixth and Figueroa Streets, and later they lived on South Alvarado Street. Photographs of this period reveal Estelle as a strikingly attractive young girl, with large expressive brown eyes and the "hour-glass" figure so fashionable at that time. She was blessed, too, with a quick mind and robust health.

Sometime early in 1900 Estelle Betzold met Edward Doheny. He was in his early forties and had made a name for himself as the man who drilled one of the first successful oil wells in Los Angeles. His first marriage had ended, leaving him with a seven-year-old son, Ned. The circumstances of their meeting are lost in the past, but the story has been told that Estelle was working as a telephone operator and Mr. Doheny, captivated by her voice over the wire, determined to meet her. Considering the fact that she certainly did possess a voice of vibrant warmth and magnetism, the story may well be true. At any rate, Mr. Doheny's expectations must have been happily fulfilled, for on August 22, 1900, they were married.

The story of the pioneer oilman began in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where Edward Laurence Doheny was born on August 10, 1856. His father was one of five brothers who emigrated from Ireland early in the nineteenth century. Like many other men of that time who later made their mark in the world, Edward was born to poverty and hard

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\*Librarian and personal secretary to Mrs. Doheny, 1931-1958. Now curator of the Estelle Doheny Collection.



work. His natural endowments of a brilliant mind and a powerful will were reinforced by the stamina to persevere through every hardship and discouragement. He was ambitious, educated himself by intensive reading, and became proficient in the law. He did not smoke and he was a lifelong teetotaler.

While still a very young man Edward left home and made his way west and south into the new land of opportunity. For some twenty years he "punched a burro across the plains of New Mexico and Arizona," to quote his own words, prospecting for gold and silver, taking part in some of the great mining rushes, weathering hard luck and disappointments. Along his way he met another young prospector who was destined for big things — Charles A. Canfield. The two men became close friends, and, later, partners.

The Los Angeles oil venture began in the autumn of 1892 when Mr. Doheny, walking near Westlake Park, saw a wagon loaded with the tarlike substance called "brea." He knew this meant the existence of petroleum and lost no time following the clue. After trying unsuccessfully to lease some land on Rancho La Brea, Doheny and Canfield located an active oil exude near the corner of Second Street and Glendale Boulevard. Digging a miner's shaft with pick and shovel, they went down one hundred and sixty-five feet where they found oil and began pumping out seven barrels a day by hand.

In his biography, *Charles Adelbert Canfield* (New York, 1930), Caspar Whitney wrote: "Such was the beginning of the business association of these two men, so different in their respective temperaments, so masterful each in his way and field: Mr. Canfield the balance wheel of sound, unclouded judgment and ripe experience . . . whose widely established trustworthiness helped them to borrow large sums in those difficult years . . . Mr. Doheny of marked business acumen and mining lore, shrewd and energetic, the dynamic general in the field. They appeared so fittingly to complement one another in the immense and daring enterprise upon which they subsequently embarked."

The "immense and daring enterprise" had its beginning in May 1900 when Canfield and Doheny went to Mexico to prospect for oil along the route of the Mexican Central railroad. The suggestion of possible new fields in that country had come to them from A. A. Robinson, once of the A.T. & S.F., but then president of the Mexican Central. In the country west of Tampico the partners found such abundant indications of oil that they bought up 400,000 acres of land. In May 1901 at Ebano they brought in the first commercially successfully well in Mexico. To quote Caspar Whitney again: "Before the oil could be marketed, means of living and working had increasingly to be provided; roads must be made through the jungle, pipe lines laid, railways built, barges and launches found, living and boarding-houses, ice and cold storage plants, water and oil tanks constructed, not to mention numberless drilling rigs or the refinery that was essential . . .



Their courage may be imagined when it is told that their first pipe line, costing upward of a million dollars, was laid before the oil it was to convey to ships at Tampico had been produced in quantities to justify such building, even before there were sufficient shipping facilities to take away the oil to markets not yet created." Their faith in their own judgment was vindicated when the Casiano field located south of Tampico brought in one of the great wells of all time. According to Ruth Sheldon Knowles, in *The Greatest Gamblers* (McGraw-Hill, 1959), "The Canfield-Doheny ocean blew in uncontrolled, at the rate of 70,000 barrels a day and for nine years this one well alone produced all the oil that Canfield and Doheny could market. When it ceased flowing, it had produced 80,000,000 barrels — or eight times as much as the average United States *field* will produce today."

Edward Doheny's marriage to Estelle Betzold coincided with the beginning of his great Mexican enterprise, and for the next ten or twelve years they travelled constantly between Los Angeles, Tampico and New York. In this strenuous, exacting life, crowded with new experiences and responsibilities, Mrs. Doheny proved herself a woman of exceptional intelligence and strong character. Her retentive memory served her well as she applied herself to learning all her husband could teach her of the oil business. She had natural executive ability and a grasp of practical affairs which enabled her to share to an unusual degree the life and business activities of her husband. Mr. Doheny often liked to say that the greatest discovery he ever made was not oil, but his wife.

It was not only in his business enterprises that Mrs. Doheny was her husband's staunch ally. She rose, as only a rarely gifted woman could have done, to the opportunities now open to her as the wife of a man of wealth. She wore her lovely gowns and jewels with dignity and grace. Her unaffected charm, her warmth and spontaneity drew people to her and made devoted friends wherever she went. In New York and Washington, as well as in Los Angeles, she became known as a brilliant hostess with a talent for gathering in her home distinguished guests from the worlds of society, finance, and the arts. But her husband's principles were her own and she never permitted alcoholic beverages to be served in their home.

Although the Dohens were often on the move during these early years, they were deeply attached to their Los Angeles home. In 1902 they bought the Posey house in Chester Place, a private residential square off West Adams Boulevard just west of Figueroa Street. The Posey house was Number Eight, a three-storied mansion of the period, turreted and balconied, set in wide green lawns. They built a huge glass Palm House (recently demolished) for the rare palms and cycads they were bringing up from Mexico. A balcony around the interior provided an ideal place to grow orchids. Mrs. Doheny imported many exotic cattleyas from England and gradually built up a collection of



more than ten thousand plants — one of the first important orchid collections in Southern California. One by one the other houses in Chester Place were acquired, and eventually it became their own little kingdom, an oasis of tranquil beauty in the heart of the city.

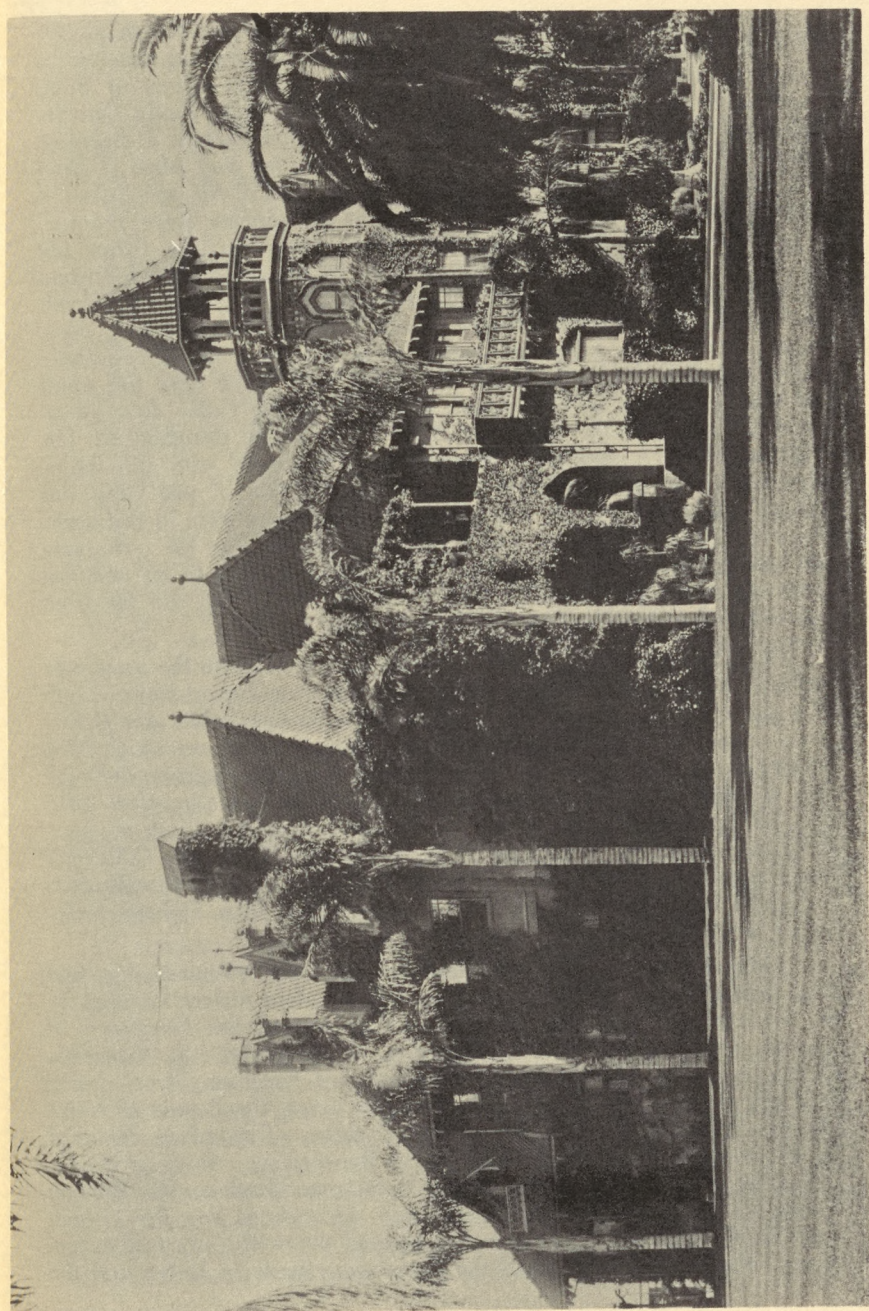
It was not long before Mrs. Doheny found she needed an office at home. A large flat-topped desk was installed in a little six-sided room called the Japanese Tea Room because garlands of paper wisteria were festooned about the walls. Later, the wisteria was replaced by oak panelling, but Mrs. Doheny continued to the end of her life to direct her innumerable business, charitable and social activities from this little office. She normally kept three secretaries busy and sometimes four. Very early in her married life she became expert at coding and decoding telegrams for her husband, and she learned Gregg shorthand in order to take notes when he was "thinking out loud" on their drives and walks together.

Often they sought relaxation and escape from business pressures on their steam yacht the *Casiana*. Mr. Doheny was a good sailor. His wife, on the other hand, was inclined to feel qualms as soon as she got into her car to drive to the dock. Short cruises rather than long voyages were her preference. Much entertaining was done aboard the yacht and among their favorite guests were Mr. and Mrs. John McCormack. The famous tenor once gave Mrs. Doheny the fright of her life when he induced her husband to go swimming with him off Catalina Island and the current swept them away so quickly that a launch had to be sent to the rescue. After Mr. Doheny's death the *Casiana* was sold to the Government of the Philippines. It lies now at the bottom of Manila Bay, sunk by enemy action in World War II.

In 1914 Mr. Doheny's son, Ned, married Miss Lucy Smith of Pasadena and the young couple made their home at Ten Chester Place. Their first child, Lucy Estelle, was followed by four boys: Edward Laurence III, Patrick Anson, William Henry and Timothy Michael. Mr. Doheny's joy in his grandchildren was boundless. He made a point of arranging his schedule in order to spend time with them, and whether in Los Angeles, New York, or on the *Casiana*, he liked to have the young family with him.

Next to Number Eight the Dohenys loved best their Beverly Hills home — a four hundred acre ranch which they bought about 1912. Located in a series of small canyons enclosed on three sides by hills, the property opened on the south to a panoramic view of the growing city. It was part of an older California, a California which even then was disappearing, and the Dohenys were content to leave its natural beauty unspoiled. While they owned it the Beverly Hills Ranch remained a place of enchantment, remote from the world, where dusty trails meandered under giant peppers and eucalypti, a windmill turned lazily in the breeze, and tree-ripened oranges could be had for the picking.





Number Eight, Chester Place



As he motored up and down the state Mr. Doheny was always on the lookout for a good piece of property. Of the six ranches he owned at one time, four were in Ventura County: Tapo at Simi, Temescal at Piru, Ojai at Ojai, and Ferndale in Santa Paula Canyon. The other two were the Alamo at Los Alamos and College at Solvang. The properties were managed by Mr. Anson Lisk and Mrs. Doheny took a keen personal interest in their operations. All the accounts and payrolls went through her hands. Most of the ranches were acquired as possible oil-bearing land and the owners never lived on them; but they fell in love with the little valley of Ferndale, studded with ancient live oaks and watered by a running stream. They decided to make it their country home, but the choice of a building site was not easy. Mrs. Doheny favored the warm and sunny mesa but her husband convinced her that nothing could be more delightful than to be near the water and hear its music, so their home was built on the valley floor. Construction began in the spring of 1929 on a house designed by Mr. Wallace Neff — a rambling, Mexican-style residence with tile floors, huge fireplaces, and timbered ceilings. At the end of one wing was a small chapel where Mass was said when the owners were in residence. The creek was diverted to make two large pools, one for swimming and one for fishing. In later years, Mr. Doheny liked to sit and fish from his wheelchair, smiling happily as he hauled up the fat trout with which his wife had thoughtfully stocked the pool.

If, as has been said, Edward Doheny taught his wife the petroleum business, he also guided her towards an understanding of their wealth as a power to do good. He gave liberally for charitable and educational purposes, establishing wise, constructive policies on which Mrs. Doheny formed the pattern of her own giving. By degrees she took over much of the work of investigating appeals and allocating gifts. The Los Angeles Orphanage and St. Vincent's Hospital (both conducted by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul), the Children's Hospital and the Orthopaedic Hospital, were among the first institutions to benefit from the warm personal interest which Mrs. Doheny maintained in them to the end of her life.

Although their giving was done through many channels, Mr. and Mrs. Doheny were especially affiliated with the two orders founded by St. Vincent de Paul: The Vincentian Fathers and the Daughters of Charity. One of the outstanding churches of California — St. Vincent's, on the corner of West Adams Boulevard and Figueroa Street — was their gift to the Archdiocese. Ralph Adams Cram, the Boston architect who has been called America's greatest designer of churches, designed St. Vincent's in the style of the Spanish Renaissance, which is closely associated with California through the Franciscan Missions. Mr. Doheny wanted to have all the furnishings and decorations for the church made in this country. His wish was carried out with only two exceptions — the mosaic Stations of the Cross were made in Italy; and the



magnificent vari-colored marbles for the altars, pulpit, and sanctuary railings were imported from Italy and France.

After the first Mass was celebrated on April 5, 1925, Mr. and Mrs. Doheny presented a scroll to the Most Reverend John J. Cantwell, reading: "We beg to tender to Your Lordship, as the Roman Catholic Bishop of Los Angeles and San Diego, this new temple to God; and we pray Your Lordship to accept it for the greater honor and glory of God, for the good of souls, and as an expression of our Catholic Faith and thanksgiving to Our Blessed Saviour." In recognition of their service to the Church, Pope Pius XI conferred on Mr. and Mrs. Doheny the title of Knight and Lady of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

During these years when St. Vincent's Church was being built, the Dohenys were living through a time of great stress. The United States in 1922 had ordered an investigation of the leasing of naval oil reserves by Albert B. Fall, Secretary of the Interior under President Harding. Mr. Doheny was accused of having attempted to bribe Secretary Fall. A series of trials, beginning in 1923, ended with his acquittal in 1930; but his name had become unalterably associated in the public mind with Teapot Dome. There is irony in this, for the simple fact is he was never connected with those leases. Mr. Doheny, with the avowed intention of helping to conserve the Navy's oil resources, had leased the Elk Hills reserves, and World War II proved he was more farseeing than any of his contemporaries in anticipating the Navy's need for oil. Few people remember now that Mr. Doheny, out of his own pocket, built the Pearl Harbor oil storage depot—the tanks, pipe lines, and facilities for bunkering the warships—and filled the tanks with oil. The depot was still in use when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

Through the long ordeal of the oil trials, Mrs. Doheny was a tower of strength to her husband, comforting him with her faith and devotion. When she went into court and testified in his behalf, his chief counsel, the late Frank J. Hogan, said she was the best witness he had ever put on the stand. Before the trials ended, however, another far more crushing blow had fallen. The tragic death of Ned Doheny in 1929 was a grief from which his father never recovered. When vindication in the oil trials finally came, there was little rejoicing, for Mr. Doheny was an aging man, broken in health and spirit.

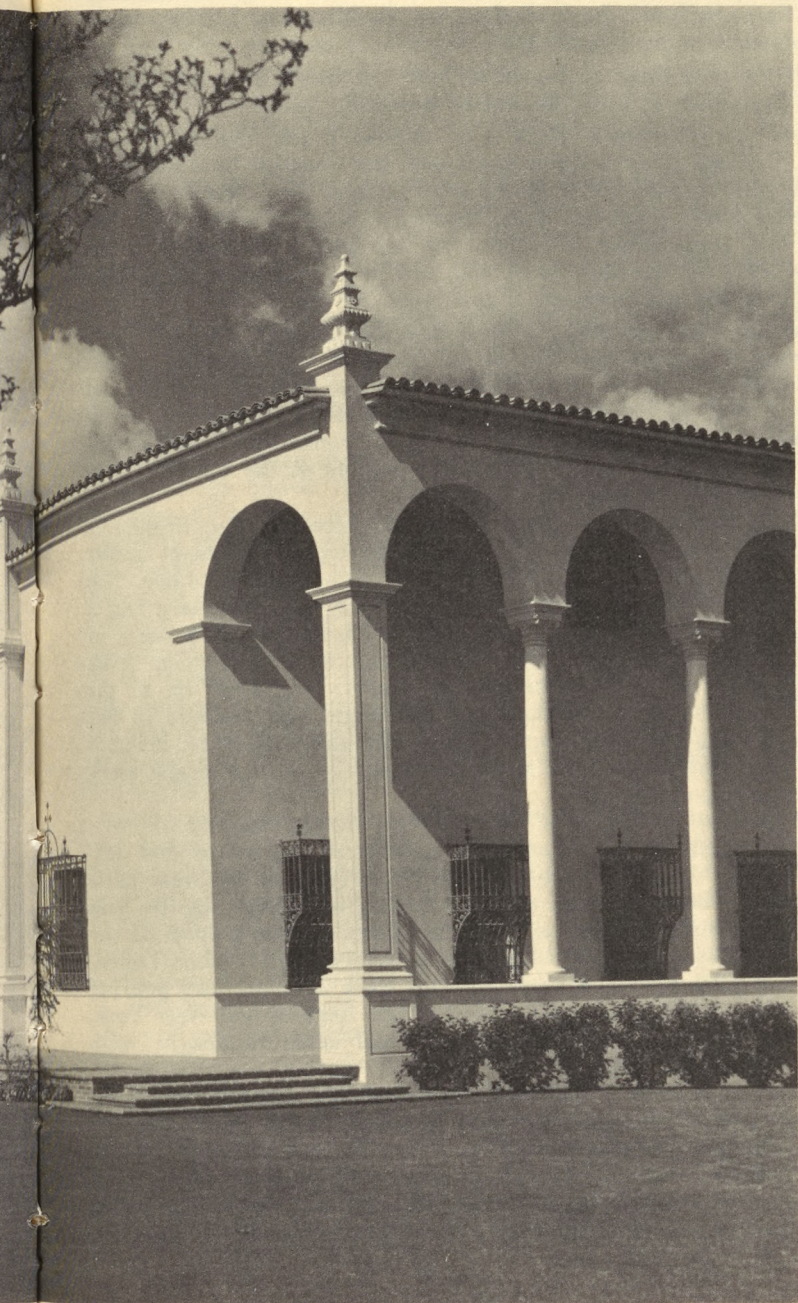
Mr. and Mrs. Doheny returned, for the last time, to Chester Place. Soon he was in a wheelchair and only his wife could coax a word or a smile from him. She quietly dropped her social and business activities and allowed nothing to take her away from him, even for a few hours. An occasional weekend trip to the Beverly Ranch or Ferndale, a drive to the harbor for lunch on the *Casiana*, visits from their grandchildren and friends, lightened the days. They sought comfort in planning a memorial to Ned. He had graduated from the University of Southern California and the university was in need of a new library. Mr. and





Edward L. Doheny Memorial







Mrs. Doheny and their daughter-in-law (now Mrs. Leigh M. Battson) joined forces to build the E. L. Doheny, Jr. Memorial Library which was dedicated in September 1932.

For the next three years Mr. Doheny continued in failing health, and on September 8, 1935, he slipped peacefully away.

After her husband's death Mrs. Doheny's responsibilities were heavy. She kept in close daily touch with her complex business interests, and she widened the scope of her charities. The management of the Chester Place properties alone consumed so much of her time and energy that she decided to lighten the burden by disposing of the ranches. One by one they were sold, but in parting with them Mrs. Doheny felt she was breaking a link with the past.

One day early in 1939 the Most Reverend John J. Cantwell, then Archbishop of Los Angeles and an old friend of her husband's, called on Mrs. Doheny to tell her that His Holiness Pope Pius XII had elevated her to the rank of Papal Countess. It was a day of rejoicing for all her many friends, but grateful as she was to receive this distinguished honor, her happiness was tempered by thoughts of the one who was not there to share it with her.

During the years of semi-retirement preceding her husband's death, Mrs. Doheny had taken up book-collecting as a pleasant hobby she could pursue at home. Collecting was by no means new to her. She had always loved beauty, whether she found it in a delicate lace fan, a jade figurine, or a rare book; and, with the true collector's sense of custodianship, she treasured these fragile objects as a heritage from the past which she, in her turn, must preserve and hand on to the future. Estelle Doheny was much too forthright and realistic in her attitude towards her collecting to make any pretensions to being a scholar or a connoisseur, but she knew what she liked and she knew how to take expert advice.

My association with Mrs. Doheny began in the summer of 1931, at the time when she was absorbed in completing her set of first editions listed by the noted bibliographer Merle Johnson in *High Spots of American Literature*. She was also buying extensively in the field of California history, using as a guide Cowan's *Bibliography of the History of California, 1510-1930*. Her secretary, Mrs. Esther Fullenwider, had given up the struggle to keep track of the books pouring in daily from antiquarian booksellers in Los Angeles and New York, and she was looking for a typist who had some familiarity with authors and titles.

I was put to work in a little dormer-windowed room up under the eaves, but it was several days before I met my employer. Early one morning the door flew open and in came Mrs. Doheny with outstretched hand and friendly smile. She wore a pleated white crepe dress and a flower-laden hat — it was her custom to wear a hat during the morning. Her lovely eyes were sparkling with the zest and enthusiasm that were



so characteristic of her, and the welcome she gave me was warm and sincere. She looked at the cards I was typing and impressed it upon me that what she wanted was not a complicated, professional sort of catalog, but a simple card-index enabling her to locate any book in the house. She was in a rush—she was always in a rush—and soon hurried off, leaving me with an unforgettable impression of her vitality and charm.

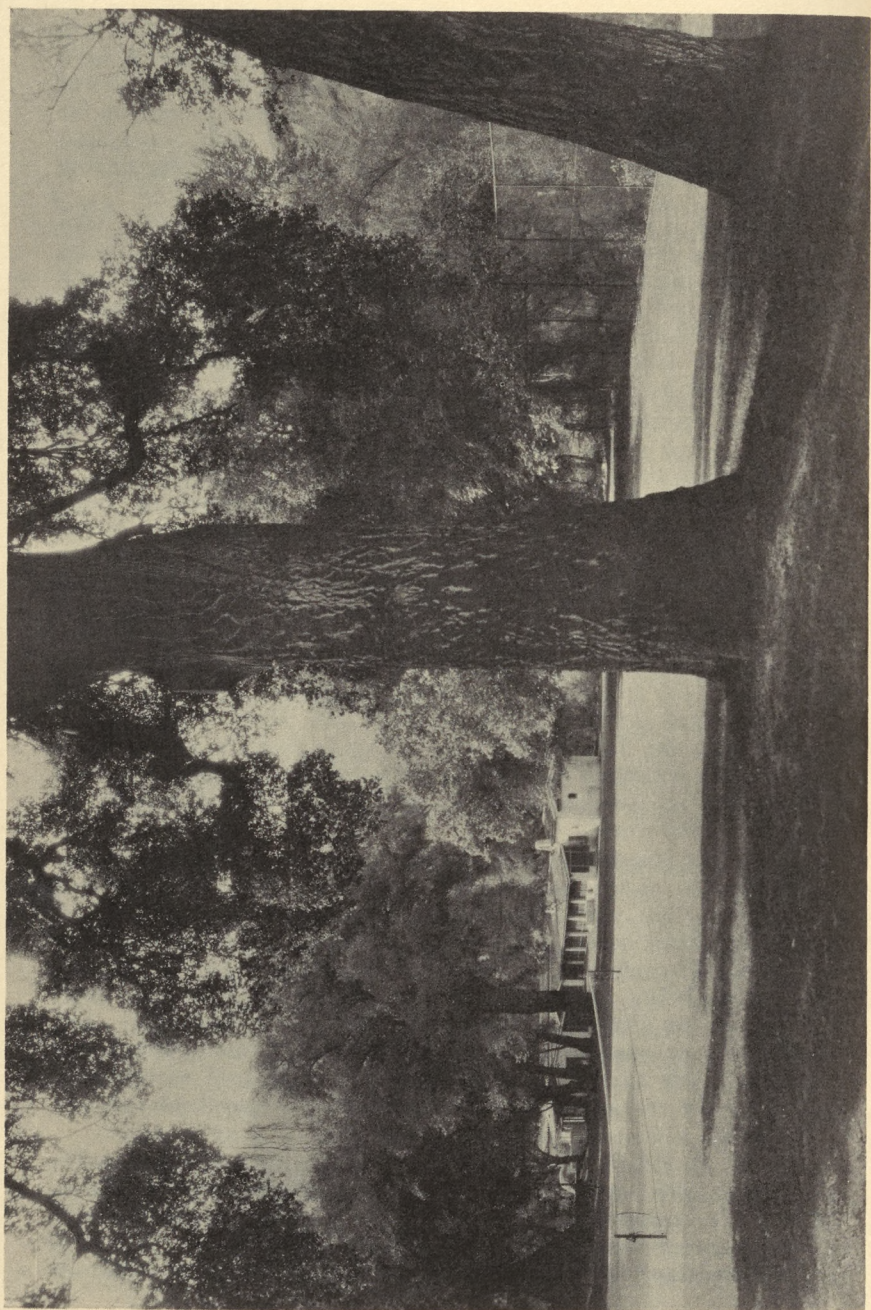
So began a close and happy relationship that ended only with Mrs. Doheny's death. We both had much to learn about rare books, so we learned together. She encouraged me to study and by making it plain that she had confidence in me, she gave me confidence in myself. The final decision, however, was always her own. I was sometimes amazed at her intuitive understanding of the subtle distinctions that made one book more desirable than another.

Among the first books I cataloged were a number with fore-edge paintings. I had never seen one before, but I soon discovered that the term refers to a book with a water-color painting—perhaps a landscape, a cathedral, or even a portrait—on the front, or “fore-edge”, of the leaves. The painting is applied with the leaves spread or “fanned” to make a solid surface. The edges of the leaves are then gilded so that the painting is invisible when the book is closed. When the leaves are again fanned out, the picture appears as if by magic. Rarest of all are the “double” fore-edge paintings which reveal entirely different pictures when fanned to right or left. This delicate art of book decoration, which flourished in England from about 1780 to the end of the nineteenth century, is now virtually lost. Mrs. Doheny was so intrigued with the little disappearing paintings that she continued to the end of her collecting days to buy all she could find. Her collection of more than six hundred examples, now in the Doheny Library, is the largest in the world.

It was not long before Mrs. Doheny began to discover the beauty and fascination of the great books of the past—richly illuminated vellum manuscripts made centuries before printing was invented; the great folios printed before 1500 called “incunabula”; and early editions of the Bible. Her innate appreciation of everything beautiful and rare drew her irresistibly to such books; and, in addition, many were service books of her Church—Missals, Pontificals, and Breviaries—and as such were especially significant to her. She ventured further and further into this rarefied field of collecting, with such success that she came to be recognized as the most eminent woman book-collector of her time.

Robert O. Schad, Curator of Rare Books of the Huntington Library, in an article published in 1950, wrote: “Most great rare-book collections represent the achievements of men or women—mostly men—who were preoccupied with a zeal for preservation . . . of men intensely interested in removing from the marts of trade great literary





Ferndale Ranch



and historical treasures, in order that these might be put in safe places where they will be preserved for the benefit of posterity. This idea has been fundamental in Mrs. Doheny's philosophy of her library. Once we have this clue, we can better appreciate her effort, because the very idea of saving for posterity carries with it an obligation to seek the best; and this logically carries the collector on in his quest from the trivial to the average and from the superior to the supreme examples. This is one of the distinctive processes of collecting, in the true sense of the term, something that distinguishes it from mere gathering and hoarding — the refining of taste, and the concentrating of interest upon that which is best and most worthy of preservation."

As time went on and Mrs. Doheny, with unflagging enthusiasm, continued to collect, space for books became a problem at Number Eight. And this was not the only problem that weighed on her mind. She was giving much thought to the future disposition of her collection. Years of effort and many thousands of dollars had gone into it. The possibility that, after her death, it might be broken up and sold, was distressing to her.

The solution of all these problems — and it could not have been a happier one — came in 1939. Archbishop Cantwell was building a major seminary near Camarillo on land given for that purpose by Don Juan Camarillo. When he asked Mrs. Doheny if she would like to build a library for the seminary as a memorial to her husband, she saw a double opportunity — to honor the memory of her beloved Edward and to provide a permanent home for her books and art collections. There was a further, most important consideration. From the beginning of the Christian era, the Catholic Church has preserved the cultural heritage of Western civilization, not alone by storing up ancient manuscripts and books in its monastic libraries, but also by copying original texts and handing them down from one generation to the next. Many of the medieval manuscripts now in the Estelle Doheny Collection were written by monks skilled in the arts of calligraphy and illumination; and history records that the first printing press in Italy was set up in 1464 in the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Scholastica at Subiaco, a village forty miles east of Rome. Thus, in electing to give to St. John's Seminary the books and art treasures which had meant much to her, Mrs. Doheny was carrying on the ancient traditions of her Church.

It is safe to say that of all the notable buildings credited to her, the library is most nearly her own creation and bears most distinctively the imprint of her personal taste. Designed by Wallace Neff, the two-story building of pink stucco gains height and dignity from a colonnaded loggia on either side. The center arch of cast stone was inspired by the entrance to the Baptistery of the Cathedral of Mexico City. A niche over the doorway holds a statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, to whom Mrs. Doheny had a deep devotion. Three coats-of-



arms are woven into the pattern of the arch: Those of Pope Pius XII and Archbishop Cantwell, and Mrs. Doheny's as a Papal Countess. The first floor has two large reading rooms, the librarian's office, and three levels of stacks housing the Seminary's own working library of some 40,000 volumes. The second floor is the home of the Estelle Doheny Collection.

Ground was broken in November 1939 and construction went ahead rapidly. By September 1940 the building was completed, and trucks began to roll out of Chester Place loaded with precious cargoes of books, paintings, furniture, and art objects. Setting up her headquarters at Ferndale Ranch, Mrs. Doheny drove over to the library every day. She was in her element supervising a team of helpers recruited from Number Eight; but she herself worked harder than any of us. She had planned every detail and she knew exactly where each book and painting was to be placed. On October fourteenth the Most Reverend A. G. Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, dedicated St. John's Seminary and the Doheny Memorial Library in the presence of Archbishop Cantwell, Mrs. Doheny, and a large gathering of hierarchy, clergy, and lay people.

The second floor remains today just as Mrs. Doheny arranged it twenty years ago. In the oval foyer a colorful collection of old French glass paperweights is displayed in hand-carved walnut cases. The main salon, running the full width of the building on the west side, is decorated and furnished in the style of Louis XV. Paintings by the French masters of the Barbizon School are hung in this room. Over the fireplace, Arthur Cahill's portrait of Archbishop Cantwell is flanked by portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Doheny painted by Howard Chandler Christy. The south wall is hung with a magnificent religious tapestry woven by Chopineaux in 1784 for Louis XVI. Opposite it there is a seventeenth century tapestry which once adorned the Barberini Palace in Rome. Mrs. Doheny's gold lacquer piano, made for her in 1905 by Steinway, occupies an alcove, and exhibit cases around the room are filled with rare laces, fans, jades, and porcelains.

Across the foyer the curator's office opens into the Treasure Room which contains the bulk of the collection of over 7,000 rare books and 1500 autograph letters. Shelves protected by bronze grilles are filled with first editions of English and American literature, fore-edge paintings, fine bindings and color-plate books. A balcony across one end provides space for reference books having to do with bibliography, the history of printing, and the graphic arts. A fireproof vault opening off the Treasure Room holds illuminated manuscripts, incunabula, Bibles, and autograph letters.

The Western Room contains all the books relating to the history of California, as well as a collection of over two hundred prints by Currier & Ives. In this room Mrs. Doheny hung her husband's favorite paintings — "The Navajo Raid" by Frederic Remington, "The Happy Hunting-Ground" by William R. Leigh, and Charles Russell's "The



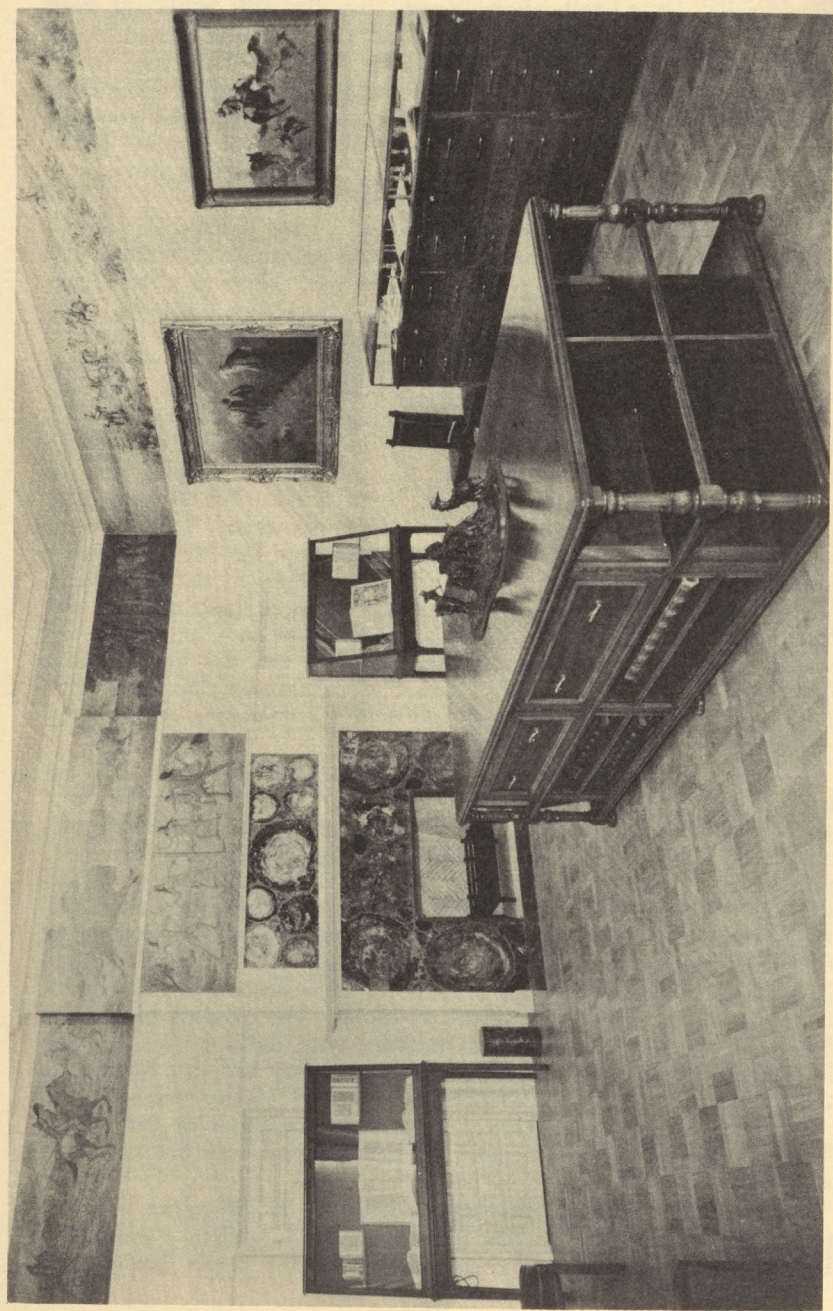
Snow Trail." On a low bookcase stands Russell's most important work in bronze, a group of Indians hunting buffalo, which he named "Meat for Wild Men." A center of interest is the fireplace of petrified wood. The rainbow-hued specimens were assembled by Stanford White for the Paris Exposition of 1900. Mrs. Doheny purchased it in Albuquerque some years later and installed it on the second floor at Number Eight. To her husband the fireplace was a kind of symbol of his early prospecting days in the Southwest.

The Western Room is decorated with a frieze painted in part by Charles Russell, the Montana cowboy whose paintings of Western life are now highly valued by critics and collectors. There is a story connected with the frieze. In 1925 Mr. Doheny engaged a European artist named Detlief Sammann to paint a mural in the large center hall on the second floor of Number Eight. According to Mr. Doheny's idea, it was to be a panorama of American history, beginning with the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers and ending with the discovery of oil in California. All proceeded smoothly until Sammann reached the scene of Indians pursuing buffaloes on the Western plain. There he stopped, packed up his brushes, and went home. Mr. Doheny then called in Charles Russell, whom he knew personally, to finish the mural. Russell took up the story where Sammann left off and painted his way around the second floor and up the stairs to the third floor. When he reached the placer-mining scene of Gold Rush days he was hard against the third floor ceiling and there was no room for the oil wells. Mr. Doheny was disappointed and felt that his mural was a failure. However, it was one of Russell's last paintings, as he died in 1927, and displays in vivid color and action his mastery of the Western scene.

To the end of her life Mrs. Doheny continued to add to her collection. Indeed, many of the greatest treasures now at Camarillo were given after 1940: A Button Gwinnett document to complete the autographs of Signers of the Declaration of Independence; the *Manifesto* printed by Agustin Zamorano in 1835; a series of forty-two letters written by Father José Señan from San Buenaventura Mission, 1806-1822; and many others. In 1950 she made her greatest purchase — the Old Testament volume of the Gutenberg Bible, the first book printed from movable type. Although it lacks the New Testament it is one of the finest of the forty-seven surviving copies. The original binding of leather over solid oak boards is studded with metal bosses and the five hundred year old pages are as fresh as if they had just come from the printer's hands. Mrs. Doheny had waited twenty years for an opportunity to acquire a Gutenberg Bible. Placing it at last in the library dedicated to the memory of her husband was her crowning achievement as a collector of books.

Mrs. Doheny's later years were shadowed by difficulties with her sight. On her birthday, August the second, 1944, while she was kneeling at Mass in her private chapel she suffered a severe hemorrhage





The Western Room



of the left eye. The sight of that eye was lost almost immediately and the right eye began to show symptoms of glaucoma. From then on her activities were directed towards the end of conserving the sight that remained to her. If she guessed what might lie ahead, she faced it like a good soldier — without complaints or self-pity. All she was ever heard to say about it was, "It is a gift from God," and what seemed at the time a grievous affliction proved to be the opening of a new path, leading on to her greatest work.

Setting to work to learn all she could about glaucoma, she found for one thing that it was a widespread affliction, for another that there was no known cure, and lastly, that Los Angeles possessed not even an eye bank, much less a laboratory for research in eye diseases. It did not take Mrs. Doheny long to decide to do something about it, but she wanted to make sure that her contribution toward meeting the obvious need was permanent and constructive. She sought the advice of those best fitted to give it: Her own ophthalmologist, Dr. A. Ray Irvine; Sister Fidelis, administrator of St. Vincent's Hospital; Dr. Alan C. Woods of the Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins, and others. In 1947 the Estelle Doheny Eye Foundation was established, its purpose being the "conservation, improvement and restoration of human eyesight." A research laboratory and an eye bank were set up in two small rooms of St. Vincent's Hospital. All the laboratory's services — analysis of specimens, furnishing slides for study, supplying corneas for transplant, etc. — were supplied free to physicians making use of them.

The rapid growth of the work soon made larger quarters imperative. It happened that St. Vincent's Hospital was also in need of more space. Mrs. Doheny consulted with her friend Sister Fidelis, and soon plans were under way for a five-story addition to the hospital. Cardinal McIntyre dedicated the completed building, known as the Estelle Doheny Hospital, on April 28, 1956. The Doheny Eye Laboratory occupies the first floor. The second floor is given over to the X-Ray Department, and the three top floors provide cheerful, modern quarters for the Maternity and Nursery departments.

After the dedication ceremonies some two hundred guests walked across the street to St. Vincent's College of Nursing where a buffet luncheon was served in the gymnasium. Mrs. Doheny presided over a large table with Cardinal McIntyre on her right and many old friends seated around her. When they rose after luncheon, all the other guests rose too and remained standing as Mrs. Doheny and the Cardinal walked slowly down the long room. Her head was high and she smiled to right and left at the guests she could not see. None of those who stood that day in silent tribute to her will forget the radiance of her smile.

The Eye Foundation, however, was not her only provision for the future. In 1949 she established the Carrie Estelle Doheny Founda-



tion for "the advancement of education; medicine; religion; and science." Endowment trusts were set up to provide for the care of St. Vincent's Church, the Doheny Memorial Library, and the Edward L. Doheny Vincentian Fathers House of Studies in Washington. In 1953 Mrs. Doheny gave the chapel and two other buildings for the new Los Angeles Orphanage (now called Maryvale).

One last work remained. In 1954 the Vincentian Fathers of the Western Province began building St. Vincent's Seminary in Montebello, a preparatory school for young boys destined for the priesthood of the Vincentian Order. Mrs. Doheny gave the first building, then a second, and a third. By 1957 a chapel was needed. It was to be small and unpretentious but in her mind's eye she invested it with the beauty of simplicity and over the door she envisioned its name: The Edward and Estelle Doheny Chapel.

The chapel was dedicated by Cardinal McIntyre on the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul, July 19, 1958; but the happiness of the day was clouded by the absence of the one who had made it possible. For the first time in her life, Mrs. Doheny found herself unequal to the occasion. She remained at home, centering her thoughts on her chapel and quietly thanking God that His dwelling-place was her final work. With a characteristic lift of her head and her lovely smile, she said, "I know how beautiful it is because I can see it in my mind."

She had lived her life in a deep awareness of the presence of God, and her faith in His infinite mercy sustained her to the end. She died in St. Vincent's Hospital on the thirtieth of October, 1958.

What was her legacy to future generations? In material terms, Estelle Doheny left foundations, trusts and buildings that will relieve suffering, further education, and advance scientific research for many years to come. This was her life-work, carried forward without interruption for more than half a century. And these public benefactions were only one phase of her untiring giving. Countless personal charities — unknown, unheralded, and sometimes unappreciated — were simply part of her daily routine. She had, moreover, a genuine humility in giving. The glory was God's, not hers. To be personally acclaimed, to shine before the world, never entered her mind.

Her most important legacy, however, was one she herself did not plan and of which she was not consciously aware, the example of a life lived with a full measure of courage and devotion. Estelle Doheny strove always to conform her life to the high ideals implicit in her deep religious faith. Because she was human, she sometimes may have failed. Because she was a truly great woman, most often she succeeded. It is in her own remarkable character that the meaning of her life shines out. Her true riches were not the material wealth which was heaped upon her, but the eternal, unchanging treasures of fortitude, wisdom, unselfish devotion to those she loved, and a radiant joy in serving God with her whole heart.



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VENTURA  
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QUARTERLY

February 1961



# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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The Ventura County Historical Society's headquarters is the Pioneer Museum, 77 North California Street, Ventura, California. There are three classes of membership—active, \$5 per year, sustaining, \$25 per year and life, \$100.

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FEBRUARY, 1961

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### *Pioneer Country Doctor*

Excerpts from a recently discovered book-length transcript written by Dr. David W. Mott entitled, "The Making of a Country Doctor."

EARLY DAYS IN SANTA PAULA

DIPHTHERIA AMONG THE INDIANS

HIGH WATER DOCTOR

THE LAST CALL





David Wallace Mott, M.D.



# Pioneer Country Doctor

By DAVID W. MOTT, M.D.

## Early Days in Santa Paula

Little time or ceremony were required preparatory for a start to the place where I had chosen to begin a pioneer practice in a hamlet of a few families, and in an extensive valley, mountain, and canyon territory but sparsely settled and, if called, possibly requiring rides of great distances. I knew this, and I knew too that there was nothing in the domain of medical or surgical requirements that I might not at any time be called upon to attend and expected to treat effectively. In pioneer years this was expected of the old time country doctor, and the best medical schools had prepared him for it.

I visited Dr. Orme<sup>1</sup>, told him everything about what I had found in and about Santa Paula, and how seriously I felt about the responsibility of a pioneer practice there. The learned and kindly disposed professor smiled for an instant and then most seriously said, "Mott, I am relieved to know that you realize the work and troubles ahead of you in that new section for you will fail if you are not concerned over what you are undertaking."

We chose to go by rail to San Pedro, by boat to Ventura, and from there find a way to get to Santa Paula. In those days there was a coastal steamer plying between San Diego and San Francisco, the "Eureka," more notorious than reputable. We took passage on this boat leaving San Pedro at 6 P.M., May 22, 1886. Even in fair weather the Eureka was a continuous performer of marine acrobatic stunts. Until we were steadied off the ship at Ventura the next afternoon, both of us were without respite from the agonies of that sickness of the sea known as *mal de mare*, *nausea marina*.

That afternoon we secured conveyance to Santa Paula with other passengers in a three seated open wagon drawn by four horses and having in tow an empty buggy. The dust was half way to the wheel hubs, and the wind was blowing briskly from behind us. That sixteen mile ride was a new and awful experience. The dust was as fine as flour and not only covered our clothing to the thickness of another garment, but made our faces unrecognizable and filled eyes, ears, nostrils and mouths, even throats and bronchial tubes almost to stoppage. Tortured by sea and smothered on land for twenty hours, gave to Mrs. Mott a rough initiation of pioneer life that contributed not at all to contentedness and best humor.

A few ladies took upon themselves the merciful work of making my wife as much at home as they could. To them this was a duty. Besides, the village was glad to have a young woman from the "outside" come to live with them. We located in a small store building which for about six months served our purpose very well. Almost



every one in the place called on us and in every way showed neighborly solicitude and helpful attention.

My first day brought two calls. The first in mid-afternoon was a visit on horseback to a man about fifty years old living in a hovel on a brush patch. It was evident that he had an advanced case of liver cirrhosis, and my inquiry brought out the usual unfortunate history of this incurable disease. For several weeks I did what I could to relieve this sufferer until death, the penalty of inebriety, came.

During my second day in the town I received but one call, and towards night. A boy about seven years old had fallen from a load of hay and showed positive symptoms of cerebral concussion. His mother, under my direction, gave him most sensible care; and recovery followed in due time. This lad's name was Bob Clarke. His name appears in much of the important activities of the past forty years in California, and Judge Robert M. Clarke has long been one of the distinguished men of the state. The intelligent and discreet guidance of a sensible mother had much to do with what he became.

Between my visit to Santa Paula to investigate, and my coming a week later to locate permanently, two doctors had appeared and had hung out their "shingles." Both soon left. One was a homeopath, the other—I do not know; he did not tell.

There were but few calls. It could not be otherwise, for the population was but twenty-eight families in and near Santa Paula. I was soon getting calls from the country, ten or twenty miles or more distant. These were to ranches, large and small—the small ones covering several hundred acres, and the large ones as many thousands.

Grain and stock raising were the occupations. Many men were employed on most of the ranches, and most of these were unmarried. As a boy in the east I had heard of young men going to California to work on ranches or to become cowboys. Here I found that I was going to see something of these in action.

The women were mostly limited to the wives and families of the ranch owners or renters. The isolation and hardships of some of these women were grievous to bear.

The pay for visits to any ranch was good; but many calls came from squatters living on small patches who did little more than live, and of course had nothing with which to pay the doctor. But my early associations with the old time country doctors caused me, as did they, to look after these unfortunates when called. Sometimes this service was burdensome because of long-continued sickness, and particularly in surgical or maternity cases. If such people were worthy but unable to pay, no doctor in those days refused to give them his best care.

I found that in rural southern California a doctor's fee for ordinary visits in town was two and a half dollars, with mileage of one dollar added when going "outside." Although I was for a while having fewer calls than when in North Lawrence, I was getting more for my services. All money was gold or silver. For many years I saw no paper money or pennies. There was no change smaller than five cent pieces.



Late one afternoon only two weeks after I had located in Santa Paula, a rugged, labor-tanned character alighted from and hitched his horse to the rack in front of my place. His spurs striking on the floor of my porch and his bold knock on the door prompted me to a response and the usual, "Come in, how are you?" I had seen him emerging from the Sixteen Mile Saloon across the street. "You are the doctor?" he hopefully questioned. "Yes sir, and I am at your service," was my reply.

With his hand supporting a swollen cheek, he went on, "I've got a tooth that has been aching like hell for three days, and I've been two days crossing over the mountains from the Frazier mines to get it pulled. Go after it. I know it's going to hurt, but I've just downed three stiff drinks of Mack's kill-at-forty-rods whiskey."

There was no mistaking that he was suffering from a badly decayed and ulcerated upper molar, and long neglect had permitted an almost entire rotting away of the crown. In those days it was a long "get" to a dentist, or even to doctors who were prevailed upon (or compelled) to remove many teeth that should have been treated and saved. This one was beyond repair, and even a skilled dentist might fear that his instrument would crush the decayed crown without removing the three roots.

At Ann Arbor, medical students took extracting instruction in the dental school. In that college of high rating, Professors Taft and Watling urged upon us the necessity in cases like this one to "go deep, take your time, and if you get the tooth whole the patient will not complain of the hurt." Local anæsthesia at that time was limited to cocaine, and that was not advised except locally applied to the gums on cotton for two or three minutes before the attempt at extraction. Hypodermic injections of icewater helped some and were used to relieve the pain of opening boils and abscesses. I had had much experience in extracting teeth in the east. I sized up this man as courageous and that he would not obstruct or interfere with my operation. I told my victim that it might be impossible to remove the tooth whole, but to do so if possible I must "go well up for it" and take what time I needed in its removal.

He gave me substantial support when he replied, "You're talking just right. I'll stand it, but get the damned thing out!"

The half and double cowhorn forceps were being used by some dentists and doctors in removal of near crownless teeth. I went up with my half cowhorn forcep, felt the horn go in between the two bucal roots, and after assuring myself that my instrument was where it had the best opportunity to do its part, I made the necessary movements to free the tooth from its structural holding; and with the usual removal effort brought it out whole from his mouth.

I have gone somewhat into the detail of this one extracting operation to let the doctors of the present day know that the country doctor knew his anatomy, knew his pathology, knew his diagnosis, and knew how to operate. I knew that I had hurt this man. He knew it better than



I did and said so; but he was satisfied, for his first remark was, "Doc, that was a damned good job!" He handed me a gold five dollar coin. I produced the change, telling him that my fee was one dollar. With positive words and gestures he came back, "There's no change comin'!" I remonstrated without avail. That night he celebrated in the Sixteen Mile Saloon; and the next morning with his horse at my rack for the return "hike" over the mountains, he called and thanked me profusely for the relief I had given him. He took pride in saying to me that he "had told the boys what a good doctor I was and to go to Mott with their ailins." I must not omit that many times afterwards through this rough and honest miner, I was given profitable practice by several men who lived in that mountain region.

Later smallpox appeared in Los Angeles County. None had shown in Ventura County, but general vaccination was asked for and we few doctors were performing the immunizing work on many children and adults.

One morning an old lady from the country appeared at my office and accosted me with, "Are you the doctor?" "I am Dr. Mott," I replied. "What can I do for you?"

"Do you haul teeth?" she asked. "Yes," was the only answer I could offer. She showed me a badly decayed molar, which I removed.

She inquired the price, which I said was one dollar. "Wall," she said, "two weeks ago you vaccinated my daughter's kids. It didn't work on Liza, and you can let the dollar she paid go for my tooth pullin'."

To my humor this was worth a dollar, and I said, "That is all right. Bring Liza back and I will vaccinate her again for nothing, and come again yourself, anytime." For years this family and its "relations" brought me many needed dollars.

### Diphtheria Among the Indians

*Piru* is the name of an Indian tribe that once occupied a canyon and mountains of that name about fifteen miles east of Santa Paula, and to the north of the main valley. At the time of my arrival there were remnants of the tribe making a hard existence. I was frequently called to visit some of them in their miserable homes. They could not pay, but would have done so if they could. I have received from them baskets, hair and bead work that had taken many days to construct, and which had I refused to accept would have been an offense to them.

About sundown one autumn evening, one of these Indians came to my home riding one horse and leading another. In limited Spanish he asked that I go with him to cure his child. Being then but a beginner in trying to learn some Spanish, I understood enough to conclude that the child had a cough and some serious difficulty in breathing. It might be pneumonia, or it might be diphtheria. He indicated to me that the horse he had led was mine for pay to visit his child. I told him to return





Residence and office of Dr. Mott,  
South Mill Street, Santa Paula  
The post office now occupies this site.

the horse, as I would go just the same and he could pay later. This he refused to do, and we compromised by his leaving the horse with a Californian (Indian) friend as security.

Taking such remedies as I might need, we left for a more than twenty mile drive with uncertain outcome. We drove hard. Some of the way the Indian rode with me, leading his pony by a long hair reata. Our journey lay over unworked roads and was uphill all the way.

At about midnight we neared an adobe hut and could hear cries of agony from within — the wailings of female voices, unmistakable proof that death had defeated the *medico* in an unequal race. The lights were the dim flame of oil-saturated sage buttons floating on gourd cups of animal fat. Two little bodies lay on separate pallets on the floorless



ground. One had died soon after the father left for the *medico*, and the other succumbed unexpectedly shortly before our arrival. That was the frightful way diphtheria took life before the discovery of antitoxins and serums.

This hut and a few others was on a mountain slope and among native trees. Nearby was a log fire to which a squaw guided me where lay three other children, to which the good sense of the squaws had taken them — but only after the first child had died. As was usual with the doctors of those days when traveling at night, I had a good lantern with me. By its light I examined these three little ones and found no diphtheria symptoms or variation from health in any of them.

Indian neighbors, and a canyon rancher and his wife, gathered to give such aid as they could to this distressed family of primitive life and human feelings. All were willing to do as I advised and prepare to bury the bodies — a certain diphtheria menace — in the early morning at a not far off native burying place. Some boards were found which I assisted in fashioning into a fair semblance of a coffin, and into which the decently wrapped bodies were placed. As the sun was rising to give the morning warmth, alike to the distressed and the happy, the dependent and the responsible, of an old and new world, I spoke a few words at the little grave and repeated the Lord's Prayer. From a gourd of purest water taken from a nearby spring, I solemnly sprinkled the coffin and afterwards the fresh earth mound while placing a cross at its head. What I did I sincerely thought to be right; and I know some consolation was afforded the stricken parents, and was sanctioned by the group of sympathizing tribesmen.

Two Indians understood and spoke some English. I instructed these as to sanitary care of the place, and forbade all occupancy of the hut until it should be properly disinfected. There was scant clothing therein, and no bedding but straw pallets, all of which were burned in my presence. I had all clothing removed from the three living children, had them bathed and reclothed with simple garments not recently worn. I had brought an atomizer for mouth and throat spraying. With this I sprayed the children's throats several times while there and instructed how to use it. I separated the children and ordered that they must not come together for ten days, explaining that should one of them develop the disease, the others might by this isolation escape. The canyon rancher brought a quantity of sulphur which I burned in the closed hut. I could do no more and left feeling that what I had done was appreciated by these primitive people.

I reached the lower end of the the canyon at about ten o'clock, and at the Dominguez ranch asked for and was gladly given a substantial breakfast. I had been offered food by the Indians, but pleaded haste to visit other sick in the valley.

A week later an Indian neighbor came and informed me that one of the three children I had seen had a sore throat, and that the parents wanted the *medico* to come. Not surprised, but much dismayed and



fearful of a fatal epidemic in that locality, I again went to the mountain night scene of death. I found one child fatally depressed from the toxic effects of the relentless death-dealing poison.

I was prepared for opening the windpipe (tracheotomy) if obstructed by a membranous plug. It was not obstructed breathing but a diphtheria poisoned body that was killing the child. The other two children, separated and lying on pallets of boughs and straw, comfortably shaded in hurriedly made "tepees" were showing unmistakable symptoms of diphtheria. I did not have long to wait to see the relentless death harpy take its sacrifices. Again the doctor of the time had to hear the wail of parents that could not be comforted. The ceremony of burial of a week before was repeated.

I made more visits. Two women, settlers' wives, did for the two surviving children all that I advised, and added their own sensible thought and labor. The children lived, I know through the tender and efficient ministrations of these heroic women who braved as much peril as do soldiers in war to accomplish victory. One had lost two children from the same scourge.

Year after year, and many times each year, I had these always perilous, and often fatal encounters; and they were battles to the death. Some were saved. In this warfare there was no quarter, no retreat. My own were but the experiences of doctors everywhere. The agony of parents and the fatalities in the world were appalling. If there is a devil and if his eons of contemplated hellishness were to be satisfied in causing suffering and death of the innocent and agony of parents, diphtheria has been his *perfect crime*.

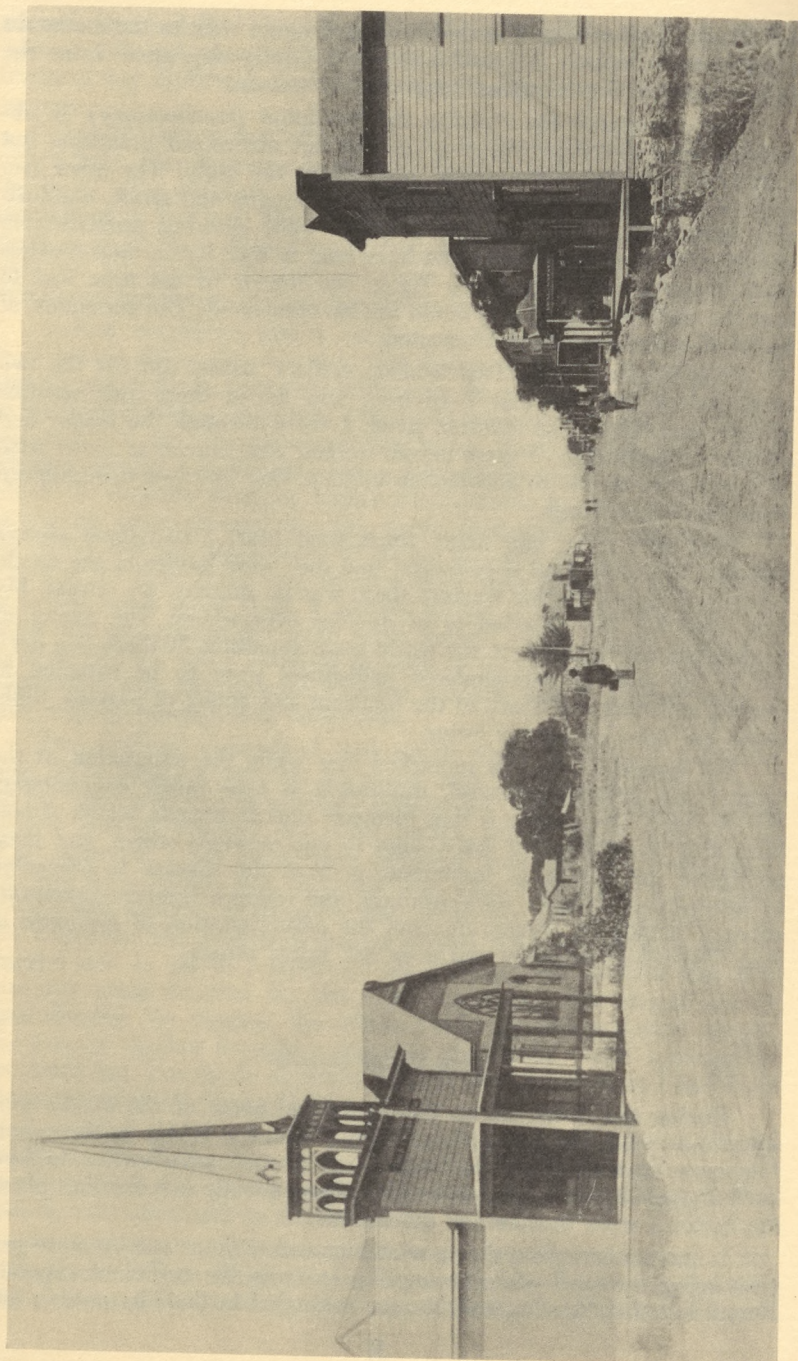
We frequently hear it remarked that while the population of the country has greatly increased, diphtheria is now rarely encountered. Why is this? The answer is that formerly one diphtheria victim almost invariably communicated the disease to one or more others, and these multiplied the contagion innumerable. Now the disease is prevented by immunizing children with antitoxin, and where a diphtheria symptom appears, intelligent parents demand the administration of antitoxin at once. This child recovers and does not infect others.

### High Water Doctor

During the rainy season the rivers and some of the creeks were sometimes not fordable for days. There was not a bridge in the county for years. Certain places in the beds of streams were known to have hard or gravelly bottoms, but between these usually safe fording places the bottoms were treacherous quicksands.

It was an exception that a winter passed without one or more persons being drowned while attempting to cross the turbulent currents. Horses lost their footing and became entangled in their harnesses; and





Dr. Mott, with medical grip, surveys Main Street,  
Santa Paula in 1898.



as they wallowed and stopped moving they and the wagon wheels sank deeper into the moving quicksands. Further movement was impossible — wagon and horses must either go down or by the force of the current be upset. Either happening was fatal. In such high water fording a stop in midstream meant certain loss of life and property.

Crossing on horseback was much the safest fording method. An unencumbered horse might, if the current was not too strong, keep moving forward or swim his way out. If the quicksands impeded the horse's onward attempts, and if the water at the same time ran over his back, he was quite sure to roll over and the rider was unsaddled. If the rider had attached one end of a lariat to the horn of his saddle and had kept the other end of the coil in his hand, it was possible that the horse would pull him to one side or the other of the stream. An occasional rider has been pulled out by fortunately securing hold of his horse's tail.

In the early years of America's settlements, many a doctor repeatedly risked his life to ford some treacherous high-water stream to relieve suffering or save life, when no others would chance the perilous flood, even on the most urgent of business matters. Once while crossing a swollen stream in an open buggy (no one at such times risked being in a top-buggy) all in it was washed away except my medicine bag which I held in my hand. The water came to the mid-sides of my horse, but there being a hard bottom the faithful animal took me through.

At another time a messenger came for me to cross the Santa Clara River to attend a man who it was feared had been fatally injured in a fall. The messenger had come over at a place where the bottom was known to be gravelly and hard. I secured a well known "high water horse" and foolishly followed the man over at a place where I should have known the quicksands might be treacherous. The crossing was nearest and was attempted because in town friends of the injured man urged my promptest help. In mid-stream his horse began floundering and slowed his advance. I knew that I must not stop, and being behind his horse I reined to go by and keep moving. Had I not done this, most any complication could have happened. We were again making progress when my horse suddenly dropped into a hole, was entirely submerged, rolled over and I was well beneath the muddy water's surface. Fearing blows from the hoofs of the animal, I made strokes with hands and feet to go with the current and try to come to the surface; but being weighted with the muddy water, I immediately found myself on the sandy bottom. With all the strength I had in me, I forced myself into an upright position and found I was then in only about four feet of water and about fifty yards from a small island held by bushes and float brush. I was so weighted that it was with difficulty that I was able to walk through the water and sandy bottom to this mid-stream place of safety. To have stopped walking for a moment would have been fatal, for my feet would have sunk beneath removal and the current



would have thrown my body into the flood. I was marooned only about two feet above the tumbling currents around me; and if the river should continue to rise, my island could soon be submerged or washed away. I clung to a shrub for support, for while being young and strong, all that had happened so rapidly to body and nerves, with the many pounds added to my clothes, made me seem quite helpless.

My horse, also the man and his horse that had accompanied me, were safely across the stream. The roar of the water made it impossible to hear any shouts either one might have made. He saw me and swung his hat. I had lost mine, but waved my hands. He promptly left making his way in the direction of a ranch distant about a mile, evidently to secure help to rescue me from my perilous position. Of course all haste was made to reach me, but its coming seemed too unnecessarily long. Several horsemen came, struck into the water, and carefully feeling their way, reached me. Because I was so heavy with added weight of water, mud and sand to my clothes, I could not mount my horse without help from them. With me they returned to the bank by the same irregular way they had come.

At the ranch I was supplied with an entire change of clothing, and with one of my rescuers went on to the place of the injured man. I found a basal skull fracture with unconsciousness and all the attendant symptoms of such an injury. I had lost my emergency bag, but no treatment could have saved him. I so told those present and directed cold applications as all that could be done. I accomplished nothing but the effort to reach him.

The Sespe River is an important tributary of the Santa Clara River. Its origin is in another county and drains an extensive mountain region. Throughout its course it is a swift running stream over a rocky bed; and unlike the Santa Clara River, it is confined between high and permanent banks. In high water times it is nowhere safely fordable. The Santa Clara River runs through the valley and has no permanent banks. The Sespe River empties into it from the north and about eight miles east of Santa Paula. As the most populous areas of the eastern Santa Clara Valley lie to the north of the Santa Clara, it is evident that in high water the Sespe shut off from approach all who lived north of the Santa Clara and east of the Sespe. Before the building of bridges and when the streams were impassable, no matter what the extremities of the settlers were in that closed in territory, no help could be gotten to them. The pioneers of that section have told of suffering and tragedies because of those temporary isolations. Several deaths have occurred and a mother and child have perished in labor where professional help could not be gotten to them.

About five miles above its mouth the Sespe River runs through a deep rocky gorge known as "Devil's Gate." Across this gorge at a dizzy height above the water, the settlers and oil workers stretched a strong wire cable and from it suspended a cage held by smaller cables reaching up to a series of grooved iron wheels that could run freely



along the supporting cable. This was one of the first "trolley cars" built and patronized in pre-electric days. There were occasional assessments but no dividends. There was no conductor, no tickets required, and the passenger was the motorman—sometimes motorwoman. It was the first pull car that some ever rode in. Of course this way of crossing the raging Sespe, as that river was often called, was needed only when the river could not be forded at safe places below.

It was a dismal rainy day when I made my first in-the-air ride and under my own power across the frightful chasm—the roaring torrent none too far below, for it was a winter of heavy rainfall. I knew that I was farther above the current than it appeared; and while I had confidence in the mechanism of the system, the dizzy height, the diminutive structure I was in, the grinding of rocks with tumultuous roar of the irresistible torrent, with every pull on the rope whether I looked down or up, brought a dizziness and numbness over me that almost stopped my traction efforts on that line. To cross that chasm in the night, even if supported a little by the light of a lantern, was a creepy experience.

The demands of a doctor varied but required efforts of exposure and danger in the early days where ever he practiced in a new country. Before the Sespe was bridged, I was called one night to a woman in a critical condition living about three miles east of the Sespe stage crossing. It had rained for days, but the stages and teams were still crossing. My team was sensible in the water, and I was confident I could ford the stream safely. As I approached the bank, I saw by the light of my lantern that the water was high and the current strong. I stood up, closed my umbrella, and let the horses have a slack line. They kept a careful footing on the hard bottom, lifted their heads, and with the confidence of intelligent animals made a steady pull and a splendid crossing while the water was running belly deep. I had dreaded that crossing; and though safely over, I was anxious about what might happen on my return a few hours later, for I knew that the river was surely rising every minute.

There were three miles to go, and I hurried on. About two miles further was Pole Canyon Creek, a mere rivulet in the dry season. It is just east of where Fillmore now is, but there was not a house there at that time. I expected no trouble in crossing here, but the water was running a formidable stream. When the horses stepped in, they dropped suddenly into deep water and came near falling while the buggy rocked and nearly capsized. At the opposite bank the stream had made a partial turn; the left wheels hit the bank first and the buggy upset, throwing me and all that was in it into the water. The horses were out of the water, stopped and behaved quietly while I in the darkness—my lantern had gone out—righted the buggy and at the horses heads got it out of the stream. Fortunately, I found my medicine bag in shallow water, it being heavy with instruments was on the bottom and was found with my foot. But buggy robe, rubber cover, halters,



and the lantern which was in my hand when I went out, all had floated away. I was more than wet through and badly muddled up. Some of the mud was washed from me during the mile further ride, as it was raining hard and I without cover.

Arriving at the small cottage, I had to hitch the team to a fence with the driving lines of the harness. There was no cover under which I could shelter the team, but there was no helping it. As I entered the house, I presented a sorry sight. I was given a change of clothing and hurriedly turned my attention to a very sick woman. I put a man and a woman cleaning and drying the contents of my bag. My patient required treatment other than medicine which was given. I accepted a cup of coffee, placed my wet clothing in the buggy, and against the urging of the family started back in a heavy rain. I could not leave my faithful horses in the storm longer than necessary; besides there were patients elsewhere that would need my attention in the morning, if not before.

A short way beyond this place was a little post office in which was a telegraph station. From this I had been called. I urged that if the patient showed need of my further attention "by noon tomorrow" that I should be called, for I did not want another such night experience. I was given an umbrella and an old oilcloth to cover my lap, but they had no lantern. I was told where I might find a better crossing through the Pole Canyon Creek which was near the home of a Mr. Kellogg whom I knew well, and who owned and drove a peddler's wagon about the country.

I stopped here, woke up the good man, and bought a new lantern which he filled and lighted. He also indicated the place where I might safely cross the creek, but was much concerned for my safety when I should attempt to cross the Sespe River, for it was certain that the river had risen more since I had forded it two hours before. It would have been discretion had I accepted Mr. Kellogg's hospitality, put in my team, and stayed with him until morning, but I did not. I had no difficulty in crossing Pole Creek, though it was carrying more water than before. The rain had not lessened, and it might have fallen heavier in the mountains, which could cause a constant rise in the Sespe River. This was confirmed when I reached its banks. The horses did not hesitate to go in. I repented my indiscretion in attempting to recross the moment the water came higher on the horses' sides, but there was no turning back. I did not guide the team. They steadily and with intelligently exerted strength brought the buggy and a much concerned doctor safely through the turbulent flood. I have always thought those horses might not have made that ford had they been headed the other way. They were going toward home. Animals are often sensible calculators. No one knows better the intelligence, the faithfulness, and the attachment that a well cared for horse has for his owner than did the early day country doctor. Many thousands of effi-



cient horses have been faithful allies of the doctor in relieving suffering and saving lives.

It was near morning when that team was well cared for by the stable boy, and the doctor found his bed. I was tired. When morning came the rain had stopped and welcome sunshine broke through the still ominous clouds. A pleasant day with much sunshine followed. There was much to do, and any old time doctor knew what mud was after several days of rain and before the coming of automobiles compelled the building of modern roads. We can tell people about it, but they can never know what mud was. The horses knew, and a doctor's buggy wheels showed it.

A doctor exalts over improved conditions of his patients. He is happy that he can and has relieved or saved; and when he hears nothing from his patient, he assumes that he is improving. "No news is good news." Not always! I heard nothing all day from my patient beyond the Sespe River. Toward night ominous skies made good their threat for more rain, and it came. Experience has shown that hard requirements repeat themselves, and I was fearful of what encounters another bad night might bring to me. Bad weather contributes to sickness and to mind disturbance, and does not favor recovery of those already sick or depressed. Therefore a doctor can expect increased demands on his services during inclement weather.

It was eight o'clock and raining when a messenger brought a telegram stating that the patient I was with the night before was worse and having hemorrhage. A doctor knew then, as any doctor knows now, what responsibility means at such a time. To hesitate is cowardice; to refuse is criminal and makes the doctor accessory to a possible death. He must go, and does go.

I must go with the same team. It was asking much of them, but I had confidence in none other.

At a usual loafing place and on the street, I sought some young man to go with me, and said that I would pay such a one five dollars. I was refused and told that my attempt that night meant my certain destruction, and that it was criminal to ask another to go with me. I said, "I will go alone then."

Dr. Capper<sup>2</sup> was still in Santa Paula and had heard what I said. With positive emphasis he spoke, "Mott, I'll go with you! I've known what high water is in Kansas. The doctors there took chances, and most of them won out." His going with me added much to my courage and confidence of getting to the patient, also his professional help would be an important matter in any required operative procedure.

With no rains during the day, though raining again, the Sespe ford had somewhat lower water than the night before. The team, with intelligent conduct of their requirement, made the crossing safely and without a misdirected effort.

At the little cabin we found trouble enough. A glance at the pallid face of the woman, the limpid hand, the anxious countenance, the



almost inaudible whisper—all told what was wrong and what must be done. We were equipped to do it, and we did.

Had a dream of modern hospitals or of specialists been in our minds we might not have been sufficiently reliant or confident that our training and our provided equipment would avert a threatened fatality. It was certain that this visit would be a prolonged one; and as it was raining hard, we had the team taken to a not very near neighbor's barn where they would be sheltered from the storm. The prognosis was uncertain, but immediate danger had been averted; and we removed obstructions to nature's part in doing the rest. An intelligent and cleanly woman was left in attendance and charged what to do and *what not to do*.

At the Sespe crossing the water had raised, but the current was not as high as the night before. When we were safely over, Dr. Capper said, "Mott, those horses are as much professional as are you and I and just as skilled in their requirements. There should be degrees conferred upon them."

Later visits were made. The patient recovered.

I have given space to the foregoing incident to illustrate what the old time country doctors went through—had to go through. Every doctor of that time in a country practice, and country practice predominated, had as trying experiences and was as determined to chance dangers as we were on that occasion. The young man of those years contemplating the study of medicine and surgery saw what the doctors about him went through to faithfully aid the sick and the injured. During the two years with his physician preceptor, he had the best opportunities to know what would be his own experiences, his exposures, and his sacrifices in the profession he was entering. With one more high water experience I will leave my many others.

To the south of the entire length of the Santa Clara is a mountain range. On the other side are beautiful, productive valleys. There were but three or four passes through which wagons could go even with difficulty from one valley to the other. Sickness or injury often called me to "the other side." One January morning a messenger came for me to go over to see an aged sufferer. It had been raining, and more rain was probable. With wet weather equipment and on a good saddle horse, I crossed the Santa Clara River where the bottom was good. On the south side of the river my ride was about four miles east up the valley where a turn took me into the mountains at Balcom Canyon, with five more miles to go.

It was now raining hard. At the approach to the steepest part of the grade was a rude cabin where stayed a "ranger" to care for the stock of cattle and horses that grazed on the surrounding grass covered hills. I knew this herder well and frequently in passing exchanged a few words with him. His name was Brooks. As we approached (the messenger was returning with me) Brooks asked us in. The rain was now almost torrential. He told me that the roof-steep trail ahead was a





Dedicatory ceremonies at the opening of the first bridge across the Santa Clara River, Montalvo, 1898. It was appropriate that Dr. Mott should be one of the speakers on the occasion marking the end of high water fording.

flood of earth crumbling and sliding. He had that morning tried it on a mountain-accustomed horse, and declared it now impassable. The man who had come after me said that when coming down that grade his horse slipped so badly that he dared not ride him and had walked and led the animal.

Brooks had been educated in an English university and was given to reciting classic lines and phrases. "Doctor, 'To go, or not to go; that is the question.'" He spoke this and waited my reply which I knew he thought would be not to go. I stepped into the rain. "What are you going to do?" he asked. I answered, "I am going to go on foot; you take care of the horses."



He said to me, "Why kill a useful young man when you cannot reach an almost dead old one?"

"The young man is not going to be killed, and he will reach and save the old man," was the answer.

I knew that the old man's trouble was relievable. He had as much right to live as any other person—he was a human being. I was responsible for that life. Had I not made the attempt, not a doctor of that time but would have held me unworthy of the profession.

Making that grade was a test of endurance on every muscle and nerve of my body. Treading uphill in such a mud stream would, after but a short attempt, justify a retreat on any other but a mission of mercy. The rain, too, was a drenching downfall. My companion behaved well. He did not talk.

We were two hours in getting to the summit. There we were met by a sturdy youth, a grandson of the sufferer. "We knew you would get here somehow; Grandpa is awful sick." He gave me his horse which I gladly mounted. The valley on that side of the pass is not so steep. The boy urged me to hurry. While raining hard, the grade and mud were not bad; and I was soon at the ranch. At the door I could hear the moaning of the distracted sufferer. Instrumental relief was immediate. One who has been taught the agent of relief knows no greater satisfaction than when through his effort pain yields to ease and a smile replaces a distorted countenance.

I had made the ranch mechanic my assistant operator, and before I left he had demonstrated his ability to give further relief when occasion would require. I knew such relief would be necessary when perhaps no doctor could reach the place. Everywhere in those days doctors taught sensible men and women many things. Necessary medicine was left and care directions given. A hot meal refreshed me, and I was eager to go back.

I was not asked what my fee would be. Before it had been ten dollars and was always promptly paid. This time a son-in-law of the patient gave me a twenty dollar gold coin with appreciative comments, part of which were, "You have earned it." Many times a doctor was given what to him was more than money. Three ranch hands accompanied me to the summit, from where one returned with the horses. The two others determinedly went with me down the now badly wrecked grade. On that descent had anyone fallen, it might have required the united efforts of the others to rescue him—if rescue had been possible. I was consciously glad of the company of these cowboys and at the cabin went as far as words would serve me in expressing my appreciation. They knew that I keenly felt the hard service they had given me and that I was seriously concerned for their safe return over the mountain. On this and other trying occasions the doctor was not the only sufferer on errands of mercy.

During my years acquaintance with cowboys and teamsters on the range and roads—and my meeting them was frequent and intimate—



I knew their feelings and their soul operations as well as I knew their physical structures, or as the looker-on knew their activities. I here give an analysis of them: They were adventurers seeking action, an open life, encounters, matching danger, but seeking success and substantial accomplishment. They were square in conduct and just in regulating misconduct or crime. A deceiver could not be one of them. Those who employed them had no concern for their conduct. It was not necessary. A suggestion to an offender was sufficient.

Brooks had fed and sheltered my horse. Of course, the messenger's horse would remain there until called for. It was near night and raining hard. The roar of the Santa Clara River more than two miles distant was to both a warning and a declaration that it could not be forded anywhere. I was forced to remain at that cabin that night, though invited to do so, which was acceptable to me, was I knew, more pleasing to Brooks.

There was shelter, food, and expected entertainment. When I came to Santa Paula, I early became acquainted with my cabin host. He was employed in a business place irregularly. He was a man of education and had visited every continent. To those who knew him best, he was a man of mystery. On his cabin shelves were books—history, literature, and some current magazines. During the evening, as several times before, he told of adventures on land and sea in various parts of the world. While still in Santa Paula he had given evidence of familiarity with the *materia-medica* and medical practice. I alluded to this and asked him where he had acquired this knowledge.

For the first time in our acquaintance he threw off somewhat the mask of his past and told me that in England he had differences with his family and had gone to France during the Franco-Prussian War and served with a hospital corps. After the war he wandered everywhere, being in India, China, Australia, and finally came to San Francisco, then down the coast and "hid himself in a primitive place he thought would stay as he found it—Santa Paula." Here he had met range men, liked them, and now was one of them. He offered no reserve in recounting his past—only when I tried to take him back to England. I was kept entirely out of that country.

I was tired, and we bunked early.

During the night the rain ceased, and in the morning a fair day succeeded the heaviest rainfall of the season. We knew that the river might not be safely fordable until late, if at all that day. At midday we rode to its broadened invasions, far beyond its usual limitations. It was a roaring torrent of surging billowy madness. Its contributing watersheds were many hundred square miles of mountain and valley territory. These would, even though the rain had stopped, continue to feed volumes of water into the river.

Again towards night we reconnoitered a few miles of the stream's encroachments, and returned knowing that I was destined to remain at the cabin another night. I sorely felt the enforced absence from my



professional duties on the other side of the river and wanted to relieve my family's anxiety for my safety, but congratulated myself that I was marooned in a place with a personality from whom I was attempting with some success to learn of men and places. I was comfortable and well fed.

On the third day my reliable high-water horse took me safely through and into Santa Paula.

Many years have passed since the experiences of those two days, and I still bring back the conversations we had in that canyon cabin as of the most instructive and suggesting of a varied life contact.

### The Last Call

He was very sick.

His last sickness had come; he knew it and did not complain.

He was weak, more restless than in pain. His mind wandered, and he murmured words that told he was living in the past again. The attendants heard him whisper of childhood's happy days. His mother was speaking sweet words to him, for he smiled as he softly whispered, "Yes, Mother."

He played again among the enchanted hills, by the little brook, and on the old school ground. Barely audible words told that he was again in the work of the farm, the forest, and the mill. He was again in college, and in the neighborhood life of the past.

Strength and attempted action seemed given to him as some imaginary sufferer required his prompt attention; but he could not be convinced that he was mistaken and that no necessity required either his concern or his services. *He must go!* He must ease that sufferer; he must save that life! The delusion of his delirium passed, and only then a disturbed sleep took the restless mind from scenes of the past.

Waking, he smiled as if some happiness—some blessing had come to him. Then an imploring look came over his whitening countenance as he asked for his horse and his grip to answer a hurried call to the cradle of a suffering child.

"It is getting dark; I will need my lantern."

*It was the Last Call.*

### NOTES

1. Dr. Harry S. Orme, member of the faculty in the Medical Department of the University of Southern California.

2. Dr. Capper, a fellow medical student with Mott at Ann Arbor, Michigan, had come to California in the hope of restoring the health of his wife, Mrs. Capper, however, died within a few days of their arrival. Capper later went to Spokane, Washington where he died of pneumonia some two years later. Doctors Capper and Mott were the organizers of the Santa Paula Masonic Lodge.



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Mrs. Grace Smith  
Mrs. Robert G. Haley  
Walter Wm. Hoffman  
John P. Thille  
Grace S. Thille  
Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Borchard  
Mrs. E. C. Canet  
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Richard Bard  
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A. C. Hardison  
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VENTURA  
COUNTY  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
QUARTERLY

May 1961



# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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The Ventura County Historical Society's headquarters is the Pioneer Museum, 77 North California Street, Ventura, California. There are three classes of membership—active, \$5 per year, sustaining, \$25 per year and life, \$100.

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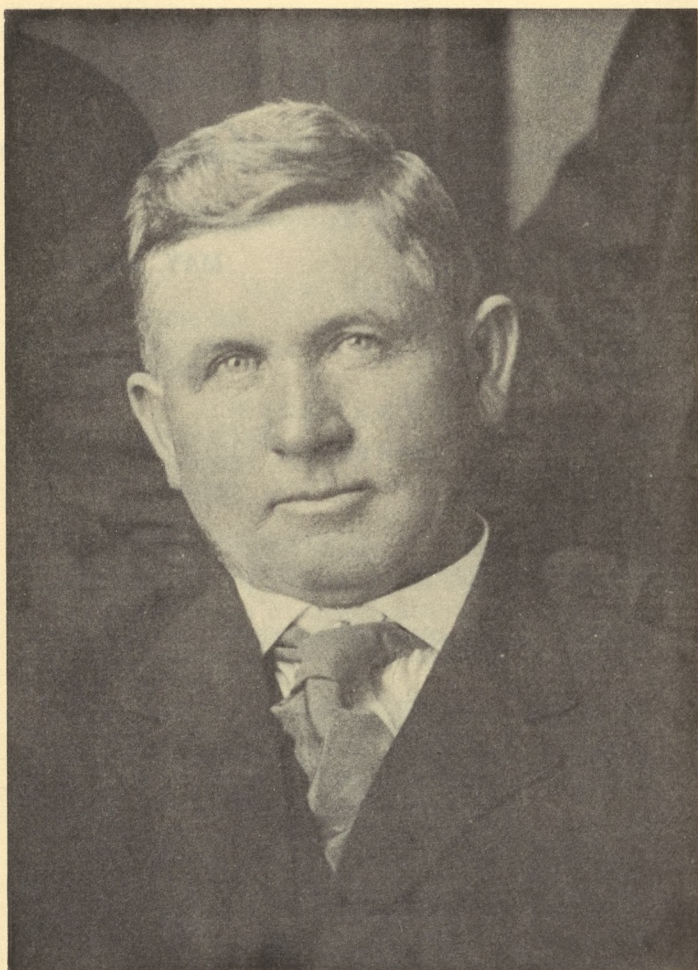
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### *The Ventura County Railway*

AN ABRIDGED HISTORY







John W. Burson



# The Ventura County Railway

By JOSEPH F. MACUIRE, M.D.

The Ventura County Railway is a short line railroad lying wholly within the County of Ventura and serving the City of Port Hueneme and the United States Naval Base at Port Hueneme with freight service via interchange from the Southern Pacific Railroad at Oxnard. Like a great number of short line railroads in the West, the present Ventura County Railway is the only segment ever built of a line that was originally projected to run from San Francisco to Los Angeles; the dreams of its original builders will be the gist of this article.

During the early 1900's the electric railroads, better known as interurbans or traction lines, had captured the imagination of the entire country. Every small hamlet wanted an electric to connect it to its larger neighbor or neighbors. Ventura County was no exception. In September, 1901 three influential citizens of Oxnard, J. A. Driffil, manager of the sugar factory; Ben S. Virdin, an Oxnard druggist; and F. O. Engstrum, the contractor who had built the sugar factory a few years before, obtained franchises from the Board of Supervisors to build an electric railway from Port Hueneme to Oxnard, running through the streets of both cities to give city service, and then to be extended to El Rio and eventually to build through to Saticoy and Santa Paula. The line was to be called the Santa Clara Valley Electric Railway and Power Company. In October, 1901 a stock company was formed and the organization incorporated, with the three original sponsors and J. A. Whitmore, P. A. Thacher, W. H. Harrison and P. F. Pyle on the board of directors. The response throughout the county to this development was enthusiastic. The Ventura Board of Trade (Chamber of Commerce) at its August meeting voted to build a connecting line from Ventura to El Rio and went so far as to resolve to take over the line when it went broke. Although there were apparently a lot of good intentions on the part of the original board, nothing was ever done toward building the line other than obtaining the franchises.

In January, 1902 two men applied to the Board of Supervisors for franchises to build a railroad from the "Brownstone Spur" just west of the Southern Pacific bridge at Fillmore, along Sespe (now Grand) Avenue in Fillmore, and thence northerly into the Devil's Gate, the entrance to the canyon of the Sespe. These two were John W. Burson, a resident of the Fillmore area, and his partner, H. M. Russell. Burson had moved to Fillmore from Illinois in 1897 and owned a great deal of property in the area, including some oil land at the foot of the mountains near Sespe Canyon. His partner is something of a mystery, as no information as to his antecedents can be found. In addition to the franchises from the Board of Supervisors, which were



easily obtained, the partners got from the national government rights of way through the Sespe to Muth and Lockwood valleys, and from there down the valley of the Cuyama to the town of Sunset (now Maricopa.) Needless to say, these plans were extensively written up in the Ventura and Oxnard newspapers; all the press notices were extravagant in their praise and in prophesying the wealth of the new line. To quote the *Ventura Democrat*: "The lands through which the new line will travel is rich in oil, and abounds in orchards; there is much borax in Lockwood Valley, and the proposed route flourishes with scenery to rival that of any other locale so as to make it a tourist attraction." J. A. Barry, then County Surveyor, having made a trip along the proposed line, was quoted as having agreed to the utmost with this estimation. His trip took him from Fillmore, up the Big Sespe, through Sespe Hot Springs, Muth and Lockwood valleys, and down the canyon of the Cuyama to Maricopa, where oil had been struck not too long before and which was now booming.

At this time also, a railroad from Bakersfield to Sunset was in the planning stage which would make a nice connection for the new Ventura County line; so the new road was named "The Bakersfield and Ventura Railway." This name, and its more familiar pseudonym, "The Burson Road," soon became bywords in the county press.

Those of you who have hiked, hunted, fished, and are otherwise familiar with the Sespe country, undoubtedly feel that an attempt to put a railroad through these "Alps" of Southern California was more than visionary and perhaps bordering on the delusional. However, engineers of experience have voiced the opinion that such a line would encounter no more difficulties of construction than those encountered by the Southern Pacific in building over the Tehachapis. They take into account that the Bakersfield & Ventura was to be an electric road, and could therefore build much steeper grades and tighter curves than the ordinary standard gauge steam road.

Despite these possible obstacles the electric railway fever had the county in its grip, and Burson and Russell had little difficulty in getting all the franchises they wanted. In February the Ventura City Board of Trade went on record as favoring the project and stated that it would give all help it could in obtaining franchises in the city of Ventura. In March the directors of the Santa Clara Valley Electric Railway and Power Company transferred all its franchises to the Bakersfield and Ventura; and the Board of Supervisors granted the latter a franchise to construct on county roads from the east edge of Ventura, over what is now Telegraph Road, to Santa Paula and from beyond Santa Paula to a point "near the McIntyre place." These franchises joined the road with the first ones granted for the Fillmore-Sespe-Cuyama portion and guaranteed that it go to the county seat. These, with those granted the SCVER&P from Hueneme to Satcoy, gave the road full coverage of the coastal plains of the county, although rights of way through Ventura had not as yet been obtained.



During April of 1902 action was substituted for words, and the county's dream road came a little closer to actual being. Survey crews were dispatched by Burson and Russell into the Sespe and began the arduous task of completing preliminary work through the mountains. At the same time Burson appeared before the Board of Trustees of the City of Ventura to ask for street rights within the city limits. Ventura at this time boasted the only street railway system in the county. This was the Ventura & Ojai Valley Railway, a horse car line, which gave somewhat peripatetic service from the Southern Pacific depot to Main Street, and which several years later was to be the leading character in a Halloween prank which is still talked about when "old timers" in the county get together. Burson wanted his right of way over the same streets occupied by the tracks of the horse car line. When his proposal was brought before the assembled city fathers, a long and loud argument ensued between his protagonists and those of the Ventura & Ojai Valley; so much so, that a decision was postponed by the board until its May meeting. Burson received the franchise at the May meeting, as the board determined that the V&OV franchise was inoperative because certain of the board's conditions as to service and extension of trackage, which had been a part of the original agreement, had not been met.

June saw another survey crew put to work on that portion of the line between Ventura and Santa Paula, and interviews with oil developers in the San Joaquin indicated that those individuals were quite enthusiastic about the new road and the promised opening of a new tidewater terminal at Port Hueneme. At this time the Southern Pacific did most of the freighting of the valley to San Pedro, and freight rates were considered too high.

All this activity and verbiage caused the *Ventura Democrat* to reach a new high in its paeons of enthusiasm about the new road and we shall quote: "We will now only have to wait a short time before our Kern County friends will come over on the electric cars to spend their Sunday afternoons with us and enjoy a plunge in the monstrous tank which will occupy space in the new bath house." Our Kern County friends would have to be up quite early in the morning, as even with the speediest equipment, travel time over the new line would be many hours; and the journey to Ventura, especially to enjoy the sea breezes, would have taken two days at the least. Burson and Russell announced at this time that rail laying would commence the following September.

In June 1902 the "Burson Road" introduced its chief engineer, Gervaise Purcell. Purcell was experienced in the railroad field, having been in the engineering department of the Great Northern Railway and having recently returned from Japan where he had spent the previous six years building the Japanese National Railway System and several of that country's steel mills. When interviewed by the press as to his impressions of the new line, he stated that the maximum grade in the mountainous terrain would be 3% and that construction, once



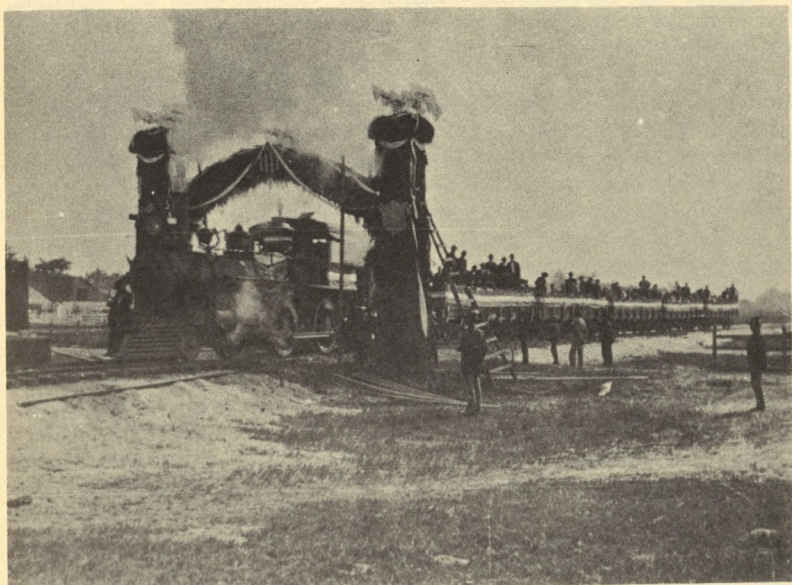
started, would go quite easily and quickly (implying that the B&V was fortunate in its choice of a chief engineer.) He also stated that the firm plan of the railroad would make the Ventura-Santa Paula portion part of the mainline and the former SCVER&P rights of way to Oxnard-Hueneme would be on the branch line, although a very important one. The Oxnard news comments on this remark were not at all complimentary inasmuch as the original work was done in their area, and Oxnard-Hueneme would now have to play second fiddle to Ventura. Across-the-river rivalry was just as keen then as it is now and much more acrimonious.

Added to the new presence of a real honest-to-gosh railroad man with the new road, imaginations in the county were further inspired by a dispatch from the Los Angeles papers that the Huntington interests were contemplating an electric line from the big city to Santa Barbara by way of Ventura and Casitas Pass, with a branch line from Ventura to Bakersfield. There was much speculation in the *Democrat* that perhaps Burson had come to a "meeting of the minds" with the great Huntington, or was the latter merely probing for information? We will never know for sure; but in view of events that were to take place later in the little road's history, such a possibility was a good one. In any event the plans were dropped the following September because Huntington was unable to obtain an unlimited freight franchise through Los Angeles.

In August the intercity rivalry between Oxnard and Ventura was given a boost with the granting by the Superior Court of Ventura to the Ventura & Ojai Valley of a permanent injunction against the B&V, prohibiting the latter from molesting any of the former's trackage or property. This was viewed with alarm by Ventura newspapers, and with cause, as Burson soon announced that he would start his track work between Oxnard and Hueneme, the latter to be his tidewater port. Steam power would be used in this work as the line would not be electrified until the greater portion of it had been built. Despite this last announcement, the partners informed the press in September that all preliminary surveys had been finished from Sunset to Ventura and along Vineyard Avenue to El Rio, along which the connection from Oxnard would be made. Announcement was also made that track laying was planned for later in the month, although a great deal of difficulty was being experienced in obtaining rail. The steel mills in the east were much too hard pressed to furnish rail for the interurbans and small railroads building in the east to be bothered with a little line on the west coast. Surveys, franchises and other costs had, to this time, cost the partners \$70,000, a sizable amount of money for that time when the dollar was worth a few cents more than it is now.

For the remainder of 1902 and well into 1903, the progress on the Burson Road was all vocal. Russell, who was apparently the line's "outside" man, made several announcements: To the effect that the "block system" of power transmission, rather than overhead wire,





First Train on B&V enters Port Hueneme, July 4, 1905

would be used (similar to the English "stud" system, where power posts are placed at regular intervals between tracks and the powered vehicle picks up electricity from center pickups, similar to the center rail of a toy electric train); that the road would eventually reach San Francisco; and that new capital was very interested in the road.

This last remark had a basis in fact, as the partnership terminated in February, 1903 with the incorporation of the Bakersfield and Ventura Railway Company as a California Corporation. Capitalization was at \$5,000,000 of 500,000 ten dollar shares; \$36,000 was on hand in the company treasury. The directors of the new company were Eben J. Smith, president and A. N. Sanford and J. W. Swanwick, together with J. W. Burson and Gervaise Purcell. Smith and Burson owned an equal number of shares, 1,200 each, and the other directors, one share each. Russell, although not a member of the board, owned 1,200 shares also. That a man of some experience in the railroad field had had a part in the incorporating is indicated by the language of the corporation papers. The company was authorized to build not only a railroad (using all types of power, including steam, cable, electricity, animal and internal combustion) but to build dams, erect buildings, sell land, generate electricity, and enter into almost any type of enterprise that might appear feasible to the board. That this person was its president, Eben Smith, is without question.



Smith was experienced in this field. He had come to California, to the Mother Lode country as a young man and had stayed for several years, during which time he learned about mining on a large scale. On his return to the east coast, he stopped off in Kansas to visit an old friend and there met David Moffat, who commissioned him to build machinery for his then budding mining property in Colorado. Smith accepted the offer, and in six months took the first mining and milling works into Colorado via muleback. He was Moffat's superintendent of construction and engineering from then on, building most of Moffat's mine works, and being responsible for the building in its entirety of the Florence and Cripple Creek Railroad. During this time he became a rich man himself, and when he retired to Los Angeles in the early 1900's was worth fifteen million dollars. There is some evidence that he may have been a very good friend of Huntington's, and may even have been a behind-the-scenes "trouble shooter" for him. This was the new president of the B&V and one to whom mountain railroads were an old story. Right at the start of his regime, franchises were obtained for rights of way in the San Fernando Valley and up through the Calabasas Pass area to Triunfo and across the hills to Strathearn and thence to Fillmore via Grimes Canyon. The road was then to follow Burson and Russel's original survey to Sunset, thence up the west side of the San Joaquin Valley to the Pacheco Pass area, over the pass and across the Santa Clara Valley and through the coast range of foothills to Santa Cruz, thus giving the west San Joaquin Valley the choice of two salt water ports, Santa Cruz or Ventura.

Material was apparently holding up tracklaying, as Burson made an attempt to purchase from the Southern Pacific the light weight iron coming up from its Montalvo-Santa Susana Branch where it was being replaced with heavier stuff in preparation for the opening of the Chatsworth tunnels, when this branch would become the mainline. Repeated statements are seen in the newspapers for that year that "work would begin in thirty days." As this theme became boring by reiteration, the press became more and more sceptical; and Burson and the road were more and more referred to in a "tongue in cheek" manner. A load of ties for the road delivered at Hueneme in August of 1903 did cause a flurry of real interest for awhile, especially as the Los Angeles newspapers again carried stories that Huntington was again interested in a Santa Barbara-Los Angeles line. The Los Angeles papers even made remarks that the reason for Burson's unshakeable faith in the B&V was due to his inside knowledge of and backing from Southern California's traction magnate.

The snide remarks of the critics were refuted, and the hopes of the faithful were fulfilled in October of 1903 when a grading camp was established on the Patterson Ranch and Russell went to Los Angeles to negotiate with the Southern Pacific for a turnout from its Oxnard yards onto B&V trackage. In November a contract for 500



tons of steel rail, to be delivered the first part of December, was closed with the Illinois Steel Company. Burson was negotiating with Senator Bard for trackage rights on the Hueneme wharf but making slow progress, as the Senator was in Washington and taking his time with the negotiations. All this activity was the occasion for another flowery article in the *Democrat* on the wonders of the country being opened to civilization by the line, and the rather optimistic statement that the line could not help but make 25-30% return on its investment.

A year and a half after the first survey crews went into the Sespe, definite work began. On December 10, 1903 grading crews began preparing the streets of Oxnard for track, and on December 12 five carloads of rail arrived at Oxnard. By December 22 grading was coming down 1st Street at Saviers Road (Oxnard Boulevard) to C Street; on C it would go south to the Oxnard Hotel. However, with this much grade completed and the rails on hand ready to be laid, somebody discovered that there were no spikes to nail the rails to the ties. Russell made a quick trip to Los Angeles and returned with enough to do a fair job, although there were not enough for four to the tie. All in all, it was a fine Christmas season for the county — its long awaited electric railroad would soon be a reality.

On January 6, 1904 two miles of track had been laid; and Burson announced in Santa Monica that his road was being built with great rapidity, going two ways from Ventura and even coming down the coast toward the long wharf at Santa Monica. As we know from local history, Burson was an exceedingly honest man; and it is felt that this last remark was "written in" by some enthusiastic reporter (inference has apparently always been a stock-in-trade of a good reporter.) Despite Mr. Burson's optimistic pronouncements (and perhaps these were in the nature of building up his own hopes) something went wrong, because on January 8, just two days later, "the whistle blew" and all work on grading and rail laying stopped abruptly. Although both the contractor and the two former partners gave much reassurance in the press that work would begin again and quite soon, by February all that remained of the project was the rail and the ties and the rumor that the Southern Pacific was going to buy the property. However, the Espee announced that it would not, but would rather continue its Nordhoff (Ojai) branch on over the Matilija to Bakersfield. As an interesting aside, it was at this time (March 20, 1904) that the first train came through Oxnard from Los Angeles over the new mainline from the big city, using the just completed Chatsworth tunnels. Entering young men of Oxnard boarded the train, woke up the passengers, and presented each with a complimentary package of sugar produced from local beets at the Oxnard Sugar Factory.

For the rest of 1904 and the first month of 1905 there is an absolute blank in all local newspapers concerning the B&V, not even an interview with H. M. Russell, who apparently haunted the newspaper offices when he was not out of the county on a purchasing trip. Then



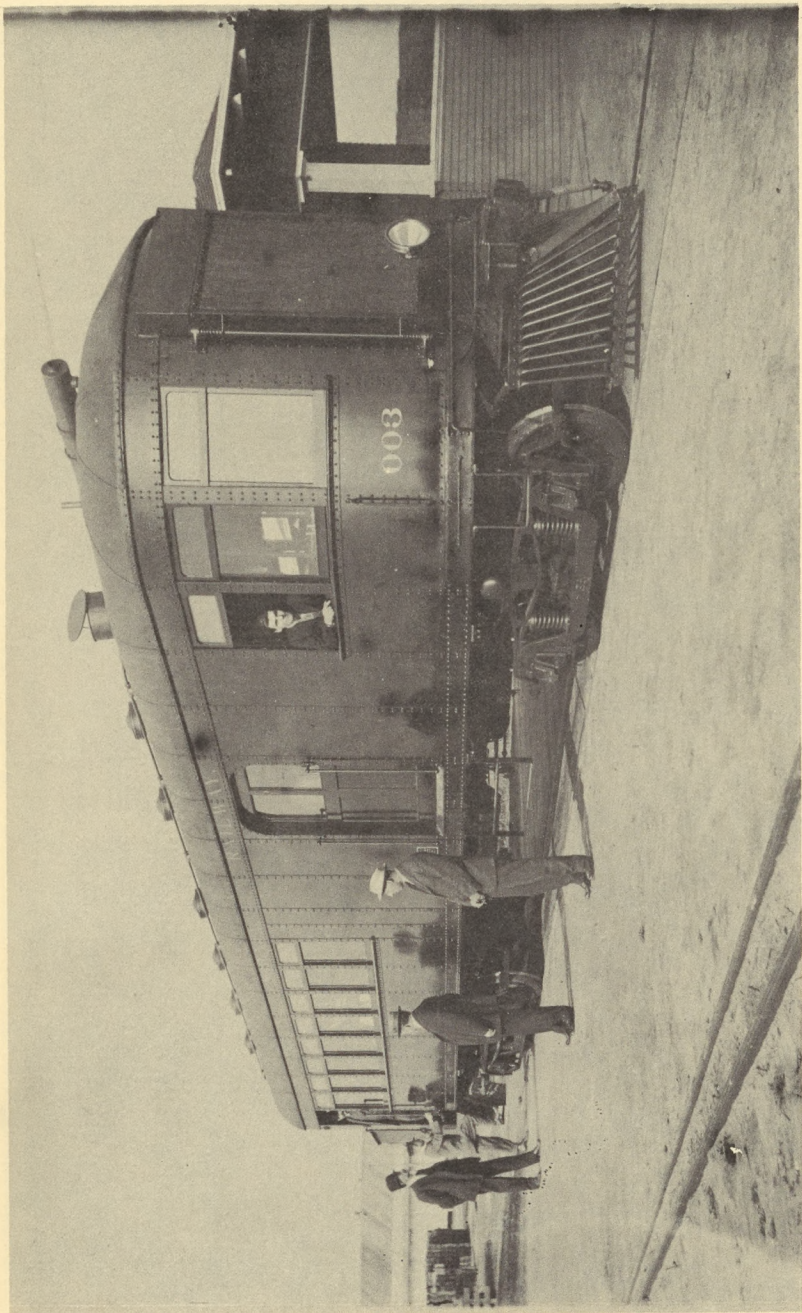


Part of the huge crowd at Hueneme July 4, 1905. First train in the background

on February 24, 1905 the *Oxnard Courier* headlined, "BURSON ROAD NOW ASSURED." Two hundred thousand dollars had been advanced by Eben Smith from his own funds to the company to build the first portion of the road. In March the principals arrived at Oxnard to talk with the sugar factory people about securing a right of way along that company's drainage ditch from Oxnard to the ocean and from the factory ground east to Conejo Road (101 Highway) and west to the Patterson Ranch. Negotiations apparently concluded satisfactorily in April, as the *Courier* announced that Mr. Burson, "who seems to be made of the right stuff," stated that the cars would be running over the new road by July 1st, and that track now laid on public streets would be abandoned as would all the franchises of the company owned on public roads and highways.

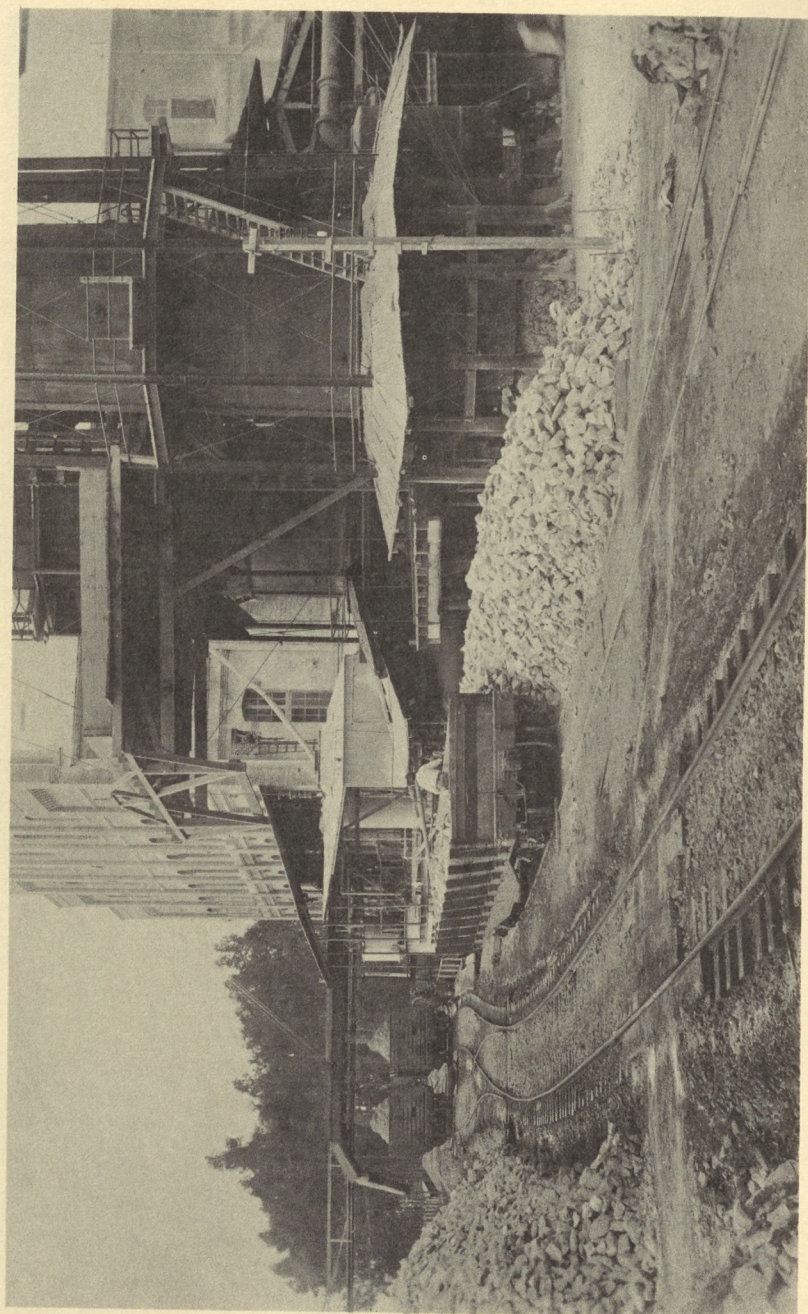
Surveys began in April on the new line, and rights of way on private lands from Oxnard to Santa Paula had been purchased at \$500-\$1,000 per mile. A spur projected to go east from the mainline seemed to be heading for Point Mugu and this, coupled with the presence of the manager of the Santa Barbara Edison Electric Company in town, was taken as incontrovertible evidence that the line was going to Santa Monica on the south and Santa Barbara on the north. John W. was very noncommittal when asked directly about this. Work on





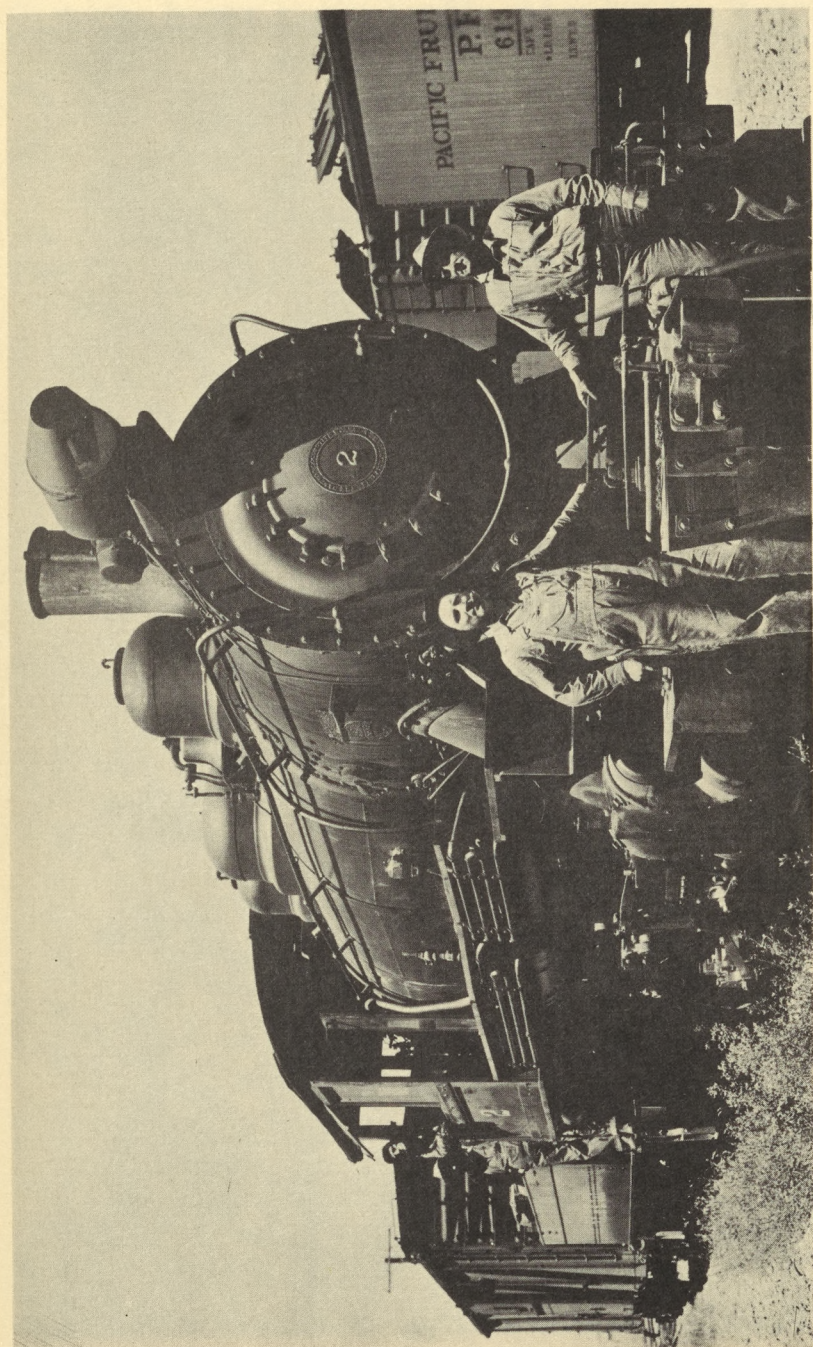
VCRy 003 at Port Hueneme station on its maiden run from Oxnard





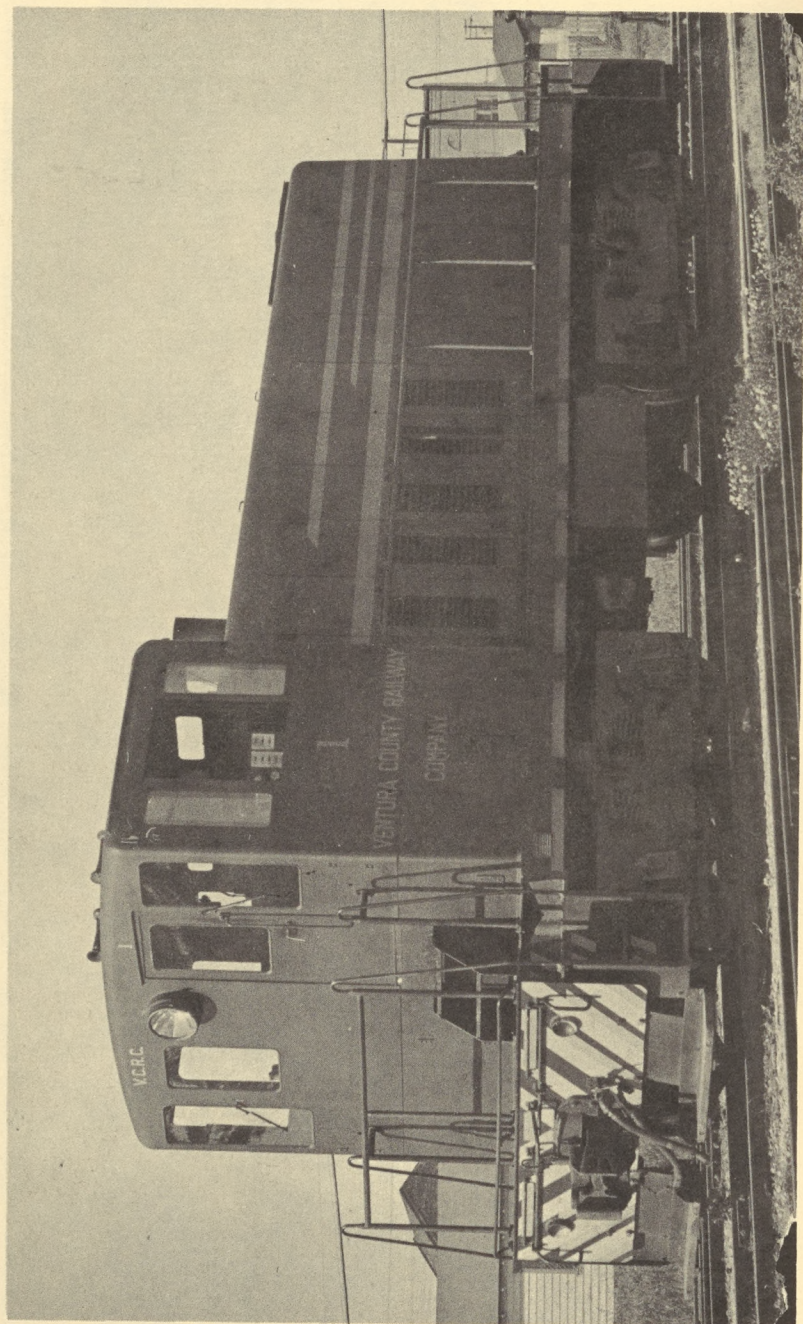
Sugar factory trackage pulp cars loading in background





VCRy #2, M. D. McKenna and Ted Valentine in cab; Henry Hammer and Elmer Chapman on pilot





VCRy second #1 C.E. diesel electric



the mainline, however, progressed rapidly; and in early June Burson promised that the road would be ready for the grandiose and gala Fourth of July celebration to be put on jointly by Oxnard and Huene-me. He assured the press that the road would be able to transport four thousand people right to the beach, just a few steps from the big barbecue pits which were being made ready. On the first of July all was in readiness except for a small bridge over the slough near Hueneme.

Both the *Oxnard Courier* and the *Ventura Democrat* had been working up enthusiasm for the Fourth of July celebration for six or eight weeks prior to its arrival. All their readers had been urged to come to the beach cities for a "scream-eagle good time," and to "come out and hear the eagle scream." This expression did not refer to pay day, as we hear it used today, but meant that the citizen of 1905 was extremely patriotic, and that the United States eagle was not afraid of anybody. The Fourth was the day it said so in no uncertain terms. And, of course, an added attraction to the celebration was the opening of the new Burson road and the prospects of a ride on the cars to the beach.

The B&V kept its promise and was certainly the big attraction of the day, as both the *Courier* and the *Democrat* bear out. The *Courier* headlined the affair and covered it as follows: "OXNARD HUENEME CELEBRATION. LARGEST CROWD EVER GATHERED IN THE COUNTY. GOLDEN SPIKE DRIVEN." "The first run on the new railroad was at 8:30, with a group of happy people determined to be first over the line after it had commenced business. From that time on the trains went and returned as often as they could and were loaded every time on the way down. Five flat cars constituted the train, and they were all right, fixed up with plank seats and quite comfortable. The iron horse made good time and the trip was certainly a delightful one and enjoyed by all who made it . . . At last Editor Fred Wells of the Hueneme *Herald* can come and visit Oxnard via the Burson Road. As the last train was leaving the beach, the colonel was seen to flag the iron horse and secure a seat in the observation car. His wife accompanied him to see that he did not get lost in the lively city, and also to get back at an early hour.

"As it is always customary to drive a golden spike when a new railroad is completed, it was arranged to drive one on the Fourth, and the spot selected was at the shore end of the wharf where the road starts up the planks. Mr. Burson, Col. Perkins, and Major Driffl each took a few whacks at it and it was finally pushed into the tie. Dr. Luedke was seen soon after closely inspecting the spike to see if it would do to fill teeth with, providing he could get it, but he must have concluded that it was not good stuff as it still remained in the tie."

This celebration brought out better than half of the county's population. Newspaper estimates were that between eight and ten thousand people were on hand; the county population at that time was in the neighborhood of 14,000-15,000.



The motive power for the big opening, and for some time thereafter, was leased from the Southern Pacific which furnished two Atlantic type locomotives of the 1300 series. In August, however, the little road with the big aspirations received its own first motive power. This was the "Seabreeze Flyer," a twelve horsepower, ten passenger (when jam-packed) gasoline car built by the Sheffield Motor Company. Colonel Driffl tried it out on its maiden run; and the trip to Hueneme took fifteen minutes, and to the end of the line on the Round Mountain branch, sixteen minutes. In March, 1906 the company's new steam engine, Number 1, arrived. It was built at the Pittsburg Locomotive Works, and was put to work immediately. It was busiest, of course, during the beet season and during July and August hauled more beets to the sugar factory than the Southern Pacific did.

In November, 1906 disaster overtook the B&V in the sudden and unexpected death of its president, Eben J. Smith. His estate immediately took steps to foreclose the road, inasmuch as the interest on the ten \$20,000 bonds Smith received for his loan to build the road, had not been kept up. This action was a bombshell to Burson and Russell, the latter going so far as to state that this represented an effort on the part of Smith's son (who Russell stated was motivated by the Southern Pacific) to keep any other transcontinental road from using B&V rights of way and franchises and thus getting an entrance into Los Angeles. The road was ordered up for sale by the Los Angeles Superior Court, and in December it went on the block. It was sold to the Smith estate for \$175,000. At this time the road's property consisted of the operating trackage in and around the Oxnard-Hueneme area; rights of way from Ventura and Oxnard to Santa Paula and Fillmore; the right of way through the government land in the Sespe and down the Cuyama; rights of way in the bed of the Los Angeles River and around Elysian Park, definitely an entrance into Los Angeles; two miles at Calabasas Pass; and some scattered in the west San Joaquin Valley and through Pacheco Pass to San Felipe, where it turned north to San Jose. How much of this latter property was actually owned by the company and how much was on option is not known. Courthouse records confirm some in the San Joaquin near Pacheco Pass and that near Calabasas, but the remainder has not been seen on legal papers. In addition, rolling stock consisted of the locomotive No. 1, the gasoline motor car (001) and 65 beet cars.

As yet we have been unable to find any documentation of the reason for the sudden foreclosure by the Smith estate on the road to satisfy what must have been rather small amounts of interest which were in arrears. We do know that there was plenty of money in the company treasury to pay all the interest then due and payable. However, the ownership of the franchise in the Los Angeles river bed and that portion going around the north and east edge of Elysian Park, the author feels, had a great deal to do with the sudden foreclosure. We base our reasoning on the following facts, which while not many, do tend to substantiate the theory (and H. M. Russell seems to have

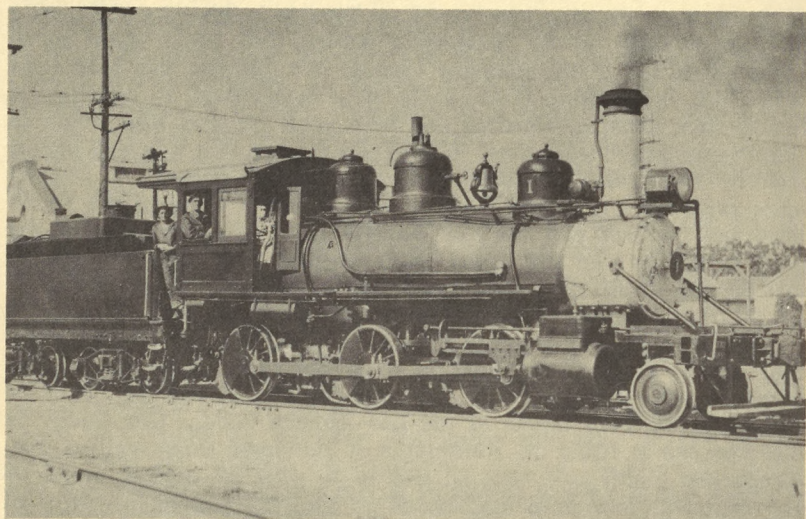


agreed with this back in 1906) that the reason for the foreclosure was to prevent the other great railroads, particularly those of the Gould interests, from obtaining access to Los Angeles. A very old employee of the Los Angeles Railways (Huntington's system) has informed us that Huntington had hired a very good friend, a man by the name of Smith from Chicago who was a millionaire in his own right, as a "trouble-shooter" on the Huntington system, and whose name never appeared on any of the company rosters. We feel that this must have been Eben Smith from Colorado as it is rather hard to conceive of two Smith's, both millionaires and both good railroad men living in Los Angeles at the same time. Add to this the fact that it is well known that Huntington and Harriman were both actively engaged in keeping other railroads out of Los Angeles and especially those of the Gould lines and the fact that the Los Angeles River was dry most of the time, it can be seen that some smart railroad man one day realized that the bed of the river would make an excellent spot to lay tracks to get into Los Angeles. Even if rain should wash out such trackage, it was common in public utility circles in those days to require other railroads to grant trackage rights when the victim road was unable to use its own trackage. And the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe had tracks on both banks of the Los Angeles River. Our theory is that someone in either the Huntington or Harriman camp realized this, approached Smith as a railroad man as to what his answer would be (he apparently had been approached by the B&V people just prior to this) he accepted the presidency of the B&V and obtained the franchises for the B&V in order to protect them. On his sudden death, it was quite obvious that Huntington and Harriman did not know the people in Ventura and did not put it past them to play "footsie" with the Gould interests and thus allow Gould to get into Los Angeles via the Los Angeles River. This is pure conjecture, but it may be the reason why the road was foreclosed so suddenly, within two months of the time its president died.

The B&V was then operated for the estate for the next two years by Thomas B. Blackburn. During this interim period, Blackburn made arrangements for construction of a short passenger branch in Oxnard up A Street from Wooley Road, for the purpose of giving its citizens easier access to the cars for the ride to Hueneme although the line was not completed until late in 1909. He also had discussions with Mrs. Mary Rindge, apparently concerning her projected Hueneme, Malibu and Port Los Angeles Railway and the possibility of the B&V hooking up with it near Point Mugu. He also at this time ordered a bigger and better gasoline car for passenger service.

In July 1908 Eben Smith's estate was settled; and his daughter, Cora Smith Carnahan, received the entire property, along with other property in Los Angeles, as her share of her father's estate. Mrs. Carnahan then turned the property over to the Bakersfield and Ventura Railroad Company, a Colorado corporation, for one dollar and 150 first mortgage bonds worth \$1,000 each. Interestingly enough, in the de-





B&V #1 on delivery

scription of the property no mention is made at this time of the right of way in the bed of the Los Angeles River. Additional rolling stock of 40 gondolas, one hand car, and one track speeder were also transferred to the new corporation. The Bakersfield and Ventura Railroad Company was headed by Charles T. Carnahan (Cora's husband) as president, with John A. Ewing, Morton M. Hanna, Samuel H. Thompson, Jr., and William H. Ferguson on the board of directors.

The "Booster's Edition" of the *Oxnard Courier* for December, 1908 gave a summary of the line's history and its projected plans for the future, including its completion from Los Angeles to and through Ventura County, through the mountains to the oil rich fields of the Sunset district, along the west side of the San Joaquin Valley (affording that section sorely needed transportation) through Pacheco Pass into the Santa Clara Valley, and thence northward to San Francisco. "This will be the most direct route from Los Angeles to San Francisco, being sixty miles shorter than any other." Carnahan is described as a man of unlimited resources with an abiding faith in the community and county, who promised to develop this property as conditions will permit. In the entire full page description, John W. Burson's name is not mentioned once; yet his vision started it all.



In 1909 the tracks up A Street to 1st were finally laid, and the new gas car arrived from the Sheffield people. It was an elegant piece of work with a twenty-five horsepower engine, reversible seats for twenty people, and operable from either end. It had glassed in vestibules, and side curtains for use in inclement weather. Frank Edmiston operated this car for many years, and he has given us some personal comments on the B&V and its successor company. He was with them for four years, working 12 hours a day in the winter and 16 hours a day in the summer, seven days a week. At one time, while cranking the engine, he broke his left wrist. He hustled over to the doctor, had it set, and started out the next run only 30 minutes late—he arrived at Hueneme only 25 minutes late. Railroaders were apparently pretty tough then, and the full crew law was a myth.

1909 was a flood year, and there were many washouts along the line, particularly the branches to Round Mountain and out to the Patterson Ranch.

At this time and for the ensuing two years, very little of historical interest can be gleaned from the old newspaper accounts of the day, although 1910 had one little episode worthy of comment. Two beet pulp cars ran off the track at the pulp silo on the Patterson Ranch (the silo was almost at the same place as the Edison plant is today) and were buried deep in the silage. No attempt was made to get them out then; the officials of the road felt that the Patterson Ranch cattle could eat them out at a much better price. Their forbearance was rewarded the following January when the cars became visible and with the help of a crane from the Southern Pacific were pulled out of the pit, washed up and returned to service.

In 1911 the Colorado owners apparently felt that it was time to think once again about the extension of the line, even though it was only on paper. The "paper hopes" were supplied by 123 pages of a cost and feasibility report entitled *Extensions of Bakersfield and Ventura Railroad Company In the State of California, United States of America*, by C. O. Mailloux, famous consulting engineer of New York City.

Cyprien Odilon Mailloux had designed, equipped and put into operation the first electric railway in New York City in 1887 and in Washington in 1889; prepared the first engineering study and report upon the electrification of the Manhattan elevated railroad in 1898; and planned the suburban extension of the first New York City subway system into Westchester County in 1901-04.

Inasmuch as Burson and Russell had already done the necessary preliminary survey and engineering work on the B&V, there is a strong suspicion that Mailloux was retained for prestige purposes, an admitted asset in disposing of the \$30,000,000 worth of bonds it was proposed to issue to finance the extensions.

Some idea of the scope of the project can be gained by a brief review of the Mailloux Report which was quite specific compared to



Burson and Russell's plans. It was proposed to build 430 miles of track fully equipped with block signals, sidings, way stations, etc. Rolling stock was to include 16 electric locomotives, 1,000 freight cars, 16 sleeping and parlor cars, and 30 passenger coaches. Mailloux estimated the total cost of equipment and construction at \$21,163,462, although recommending that the \$30,000,000 in bonds be sold.

There is some evidence that the Colorado group may have been more interested in dangling their franchises (and supposedly only remaining Los Angeles-San Francisco route) as bait for some of the major competitors of the Southern Pacific, than they were in constructing the road, itself. The hooking of such fish would have meant enormous profits, of course. The Los Angeles Sunday *Times* of April 2, 1911 under the heading, "Four Great Railways Head For City" gave conspicuous coverage to potential transcontinental rail development. The Gould interests (Western Pacific) were planning to enter Los Angeles from Utah; the Rock Island was coming via Benson, Arizona; the St. Louis and San Francisco would build from Quanah, Texas; and that mighty empire builder, James J. Hill, was planning to extend his Great Northern to Los Angeles by way of the San Joaquin Valley.

Mailloux reasoned that all of these rail tycoons were more than anxious to tap the resources of the rich San Joaquin Valley and cut into the virtual monopoly of the Southern Pacific:

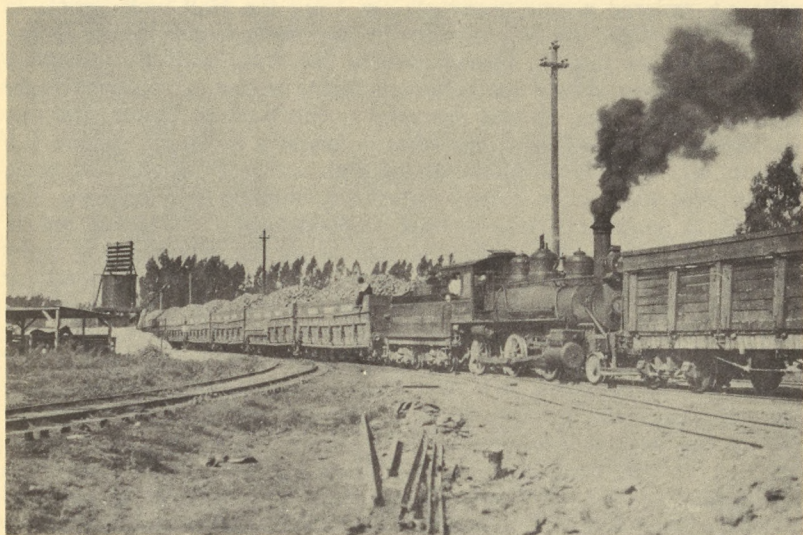
"This field is considered so attractive and profitable that all the great railroad systems which run, or expect to run into either San Francisco, Oakland, or Los Angeles, are admittedly eager and anxious to enter it . . . The Company (B&V) holds the key to the only route available for a competing line into and through the rich field mentioned above. This circumstance suffices, of itself, to make the financial success of its main line certain beyond pre-adventure.

"As indicated in the newspaper article, there are four large railroads which expect, sooner or later, to reach the San Joaquin Valley. Two of them, the Great Northern and the Western Pacific, are roads seeking entrance from the north by extensions run southward from lines running to San Francisco. The other two, the Rock Island and the St. Louis and San Francisco systems, are seeking entrance from the south by extensions run northward from Los Angeles.

"If, as the owners of the B&V RR Co. have every reason to believe, the route controlled by that company is the only one available and feasible, it is sure to be in a position to dictate terms to one or more, or all of these companies. This result will be made all the more certain by the physical advantages which the new line will have over the existing lines."

In retrospect, it is impossible to conjure a vision of the Board of Directors of the Bakersfield and Ventura Railroad dictating terms to the likes of Jim Hill or the Gould interests. Only an inmate of the opium dens of Oxnard's infamous China Alley would have been capable of such audacious dreams.





VCRy #1 hauling load of beet racks into the sugar factory yards, circa 1908

This report was evidently the dying struggle of the butterfly of grandiosity to emerge from the cocoon of mediocrity. Within weeks the Bakersfield and Ventura Railroad was purchased by the Ventura County Railway Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of the American Beet Sugar Company; and its previous existence as primarily a beet hauling road was firmed. There would be no more talk of its extension. This was a natural enough effect of the big depression of 1907-08 and the general recession of all interurban lines which was beginning at this time with the advent of more and more automobiles on the road. The Ventura County Railway took over all existing trackage, rolling stock and property of the B&V, but not the rights of way, franchises, etc. of the planned extensions.

The original Board of Directors of the Ventura County Railway were president, Robert Oxnard (brother of Henry T. Oxnard, president of the sugar company) and owner, for the sugar company, of 296 shares of stock; and J. A. Driffl, manager of the factory; J. D. Barry; A. M. Duperu; and Rudolph Beck, each of whom owned one share of stock. J. A. Driffl became manager of the railroad. This practice, that of the manager of the sugar company being also general manager of the railroad, was continued all during the time the line was owned by the sugar company.



After the line had been under the new management for a year, Mr. Driffil, who had started the Santa Clara Valley Electric Railway and Power Company, and had always taken a great interest in the railroad, ordered a new passenger car from the Hall-Scott people in Emeryville. This car was similar in appearance and length to the interurban cars then in general use in the west, with the exception that it was powered by a six cylinder gasoline engine of 150 horsepower instead of electricity. It was delivered to the Ventura County Railway on January 30, 1913, and immediately made a great hit. Frank Edmiston, whom we have quoted above, was conductor on the car when it was used, which soon became Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. The upsurge in passenger traffic between Hueneme and Oxnard and return, which had been expected with the arrival of the new car, was sadly lacking in appearance. However, it was used for a long time for switching beet cars around on the sugar factory trackage and getting interchange cars from the Southern Pacific. Its presence, however, gave Major Driffil the opportunity to emblazon on its sides the new herald of the company, a looped leather belt, the free end dangling through the buckle, the loop shaped to remind one of a sugar beet and within the loop the words BEET BELT ROUTE. Because the line was, at that time, a passenger as well as a freight line, passes were exchanged between the officers of this short line road and those of all the major railroads in the country. Perusal of some of correspondence is quite interesting when one notes the "soft pedalling" of the size of the VCry as the Santa Fe or Southern Pacific is asked for passes for officers, "passes on our line being enclosed."

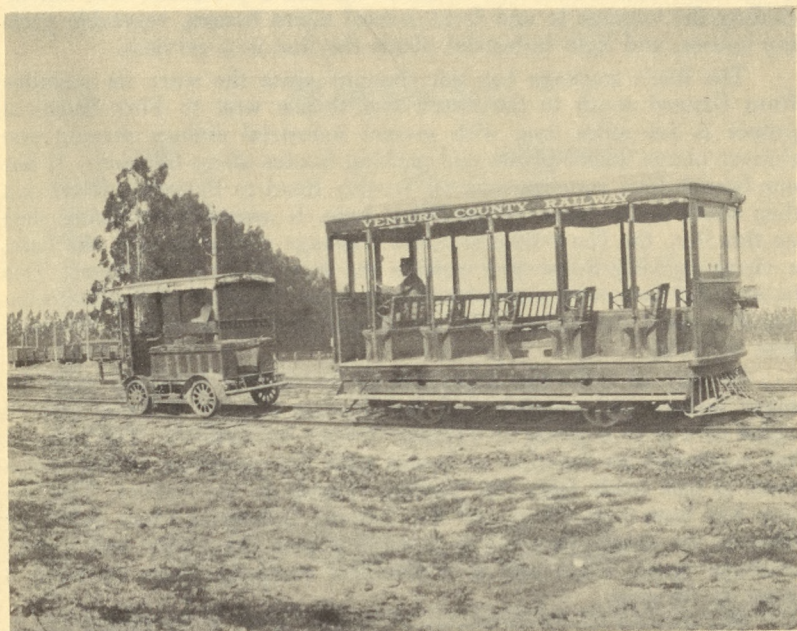
The appearance of the new Hall-Scott car (003) in 1913 signaled the last bit of innovation and "out of the ordinary" activity for the company for twenty-seven years. The little road did very well financially, although no ex-general manager has ever been heard to admit it. Even during the great depression of the thirties, only one year found its operating ratio to be over 100%, indicating a loss.

As the years progressed, the agriculture of the district became more and more diversified and less and less sugar beets were grown in the area. As the sugar beet traffic grew smaller, the branches to Round Mountain, DeBo, Arnold, McGrath and the Patterson Ranch were cut back until only the present mainline and branch were left. On December 31, 1926 passenger service stopped; and in November, 1927 all track was removed from A Street from 8th Street to Wooley Road. By 1929 the Round Mountain branch was but a memory, and the present Navy Base branch was all that was left of the Patterson Ranch branch.

In 1939 the present Oxnard Harbor District was formed, and Dock One was built and opened for use. Existing trackage was lengthened into the dock to serve the intended traffic to and from ships loading and unloading for the county area.

With the gathering of war clouds in late 1940 and 1941, the Navy moved to take over the port at Hueneme; and with the outbreak





VCRy #001 and #002 (ex-B&V 001 and 002) circa 1913  
 The Seabreeze Flyer, #001, was Ventura County's first school bus

of hostilities, the base here supplied construction material for all naval installations in the Pacific. (With what nostalgia did the author read while in the Philippines in 1943, stencilled on the side of a big steel pontoon but "S. O. USN Sup Depot, Port Hueneme, Calif.") The trackage from the South Dump on Patterson was extended into the base, and every bit of material sent by rail to the base during the war was transhipped from the Southern Pacific over Ventura County Railway trackage. VCRy trackage on the base property was purchased by the Navy and the VCRy given movement rights over it at a set figure per car. In return, the VCRy gave trackage rights to the contractor on the base (Pacific Naval Air Bases) to operate on its tracks, also at a set figure per car. Needless to say, this movement of tonnage over VCRy made the road one of the richest in the county; so much so, that the Southern Pacific, which had been approached by the sugar company several times to buy the road prior to the war and had turned down the deal, was now quite anxious to do business. Of course, the sugar people were not a bit interested. How much tonnage was moved has not as yet been compiled by your historian, but it was a great deal.



Following the war the huge tonnage dropped; but enough goes to the base each month now to make the line a profitable one, not including the tonnage to and from several citrus houses, vegetable packing houses, and light industrial plants the line now services.

The line's trackage has not changed since the war; its mainline from Oxnard south to the beach and thence west to Port Hueneme proper is 5.4 miles long with several industrial sidings serving machinery plants, paper plants and packing houses along the route. It has one branch line, running west on Wooley Road to Patterson Road and then south to the gates of the Naval base. It serves one packing shed on this line, the Navy base and, via trackage rights through the base, a citrus packing house just outside the base in Port Hueneme. This latter house cannot be reached by the mainline because of beach erosion which washed out about 100 feet of mainline track during the high seas of 1952.

In July of 1959 the American Crystal Sugar Company sold the sugar factory and grounds and the Ventura County Railway and all rights of way to a group of Ventura County businessmen. The railroad has continued its function as before with the exception of the movement of beet loads from the Southern Pacific to the factory. The factory has been torn down and the Oxnard Industrial Plaza is taking form in its stead. There is a possibility that the VCRy will extend trackage again, when and if a chemical company elects to build a plant in its area.

The present board of directors consists of T. A. McMillan, president; and Martin Smith; Ray Barnard, all of Ventura County; and Bernard Skoglund of Milwaukee. C. C. (Pat) O'Hara, who was the last General Manager of the line for the sugar company, has retained the same position under the new board. The new board has indicated its interest in the history and background of their railroad, and plan on having a small museum in their new offices, and will display the last remaining serviceable Prairie-type steam locomotive in California, and the Hall-Scott gas car mentioned above, on the special trackage near the new offices.

We wish "our railroad" all the good fortune and good hauling possible in its future, and may it never forget its almost glorious past.



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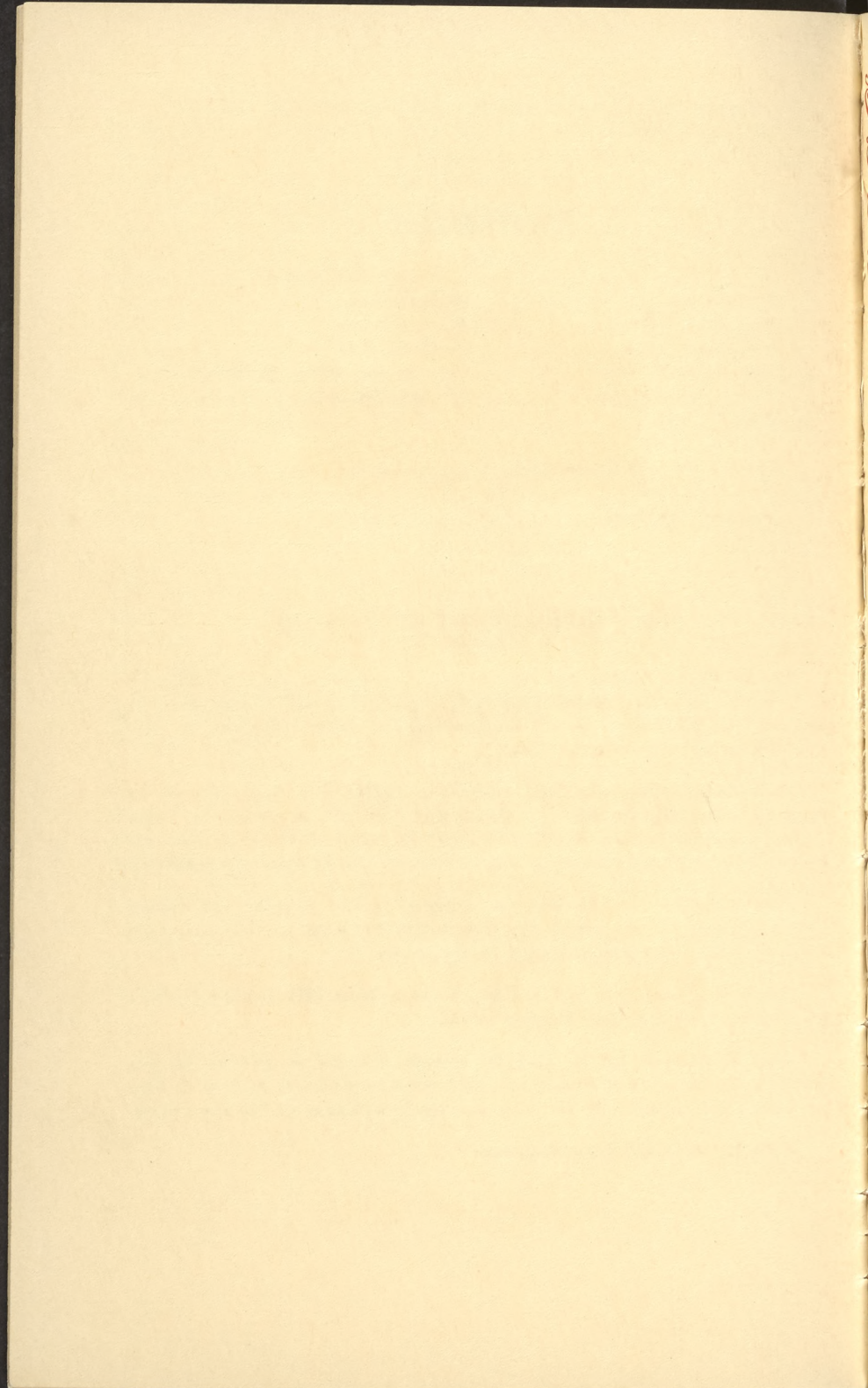
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*County Stationers, Inc.,* 532 E. Main, Ventura. Since 1898 Ventura County's complete stationer and office furniture dealer.

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VENTURA  
COUNTY  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
QUARTERLY

August 1961



# *The Ventura County Historical Society*

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The Ventura County Historical Society's headquarters is the Pioneer Museum, 77 North California Street, Ventura, California. There are three classes of membership—active, \$5 per year, sustaining, \$25 per year and life, \$100.

The QUARTERLY is published in February, May, August and November from the Society's headquarters at the Pioneer museum. The editorial staff is composed of Chas. F. Outland, Chairman, Mrs. D. A. Cameron, Mrs. C. R. Nieland, Grant Heil and Robert Pfeiler.

The Society assumes no responsibility for the statements or opinions of authors of various articles. All communications should be addressed to the Society at the Pioneer Museum. Memberships include subscription to the QUARTERLY. Additional copies are available at \$1.00 each.

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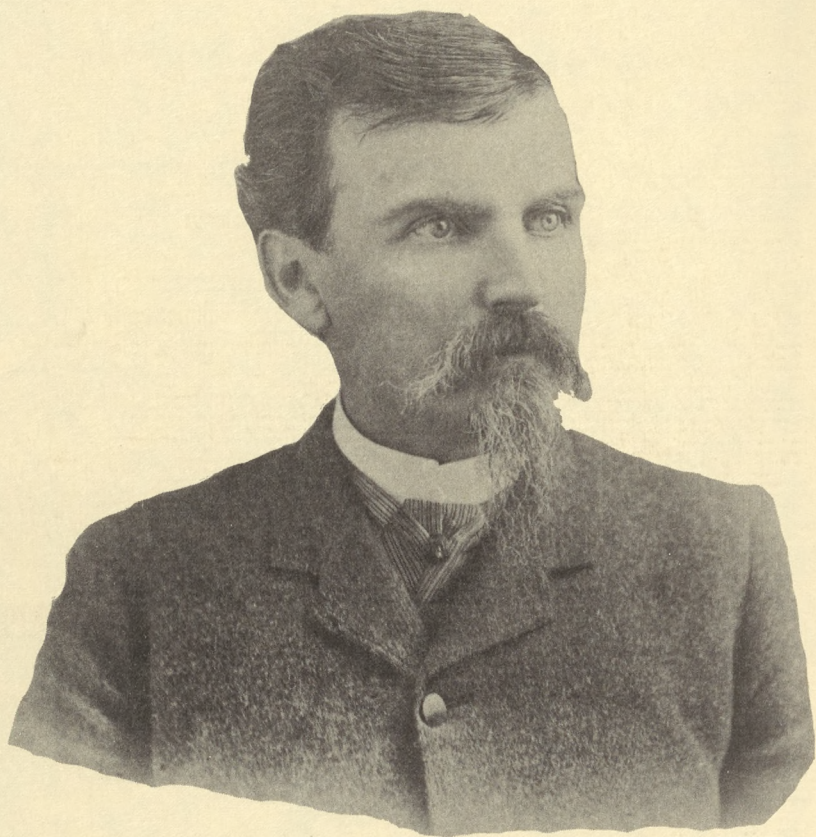
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Cephas L. Bard, M.D.  
Founder of The Society of Ventura County Pioneers



# The Society of Ventura County Pioneers

By J. H. MORRISON

While The Society of Ventura County Pioneers was not an official organization until years after the real pioneers had arrived, it had its inception in those first early days of the settlement of the county. Those were days of sparse population, days when the vast range holdings of the Dons were being converted slowly and with infinite labor to agriculture. The average settler was too busy to bother with official organization; but there is evidence that these men were united by the strong bonds of their common lot, which unity resulted in separation from Santa Barbara County and the establishment of the County of Ventura on January 1, 1873. Eighteen years were to elapse before the organization and incorporation of a pioneer society.

The prime mover in the organization was Cephas L. Bard, M.D. who called a meeting to be held at the courthouse on September 19, 1891 to form a Ventura County Pioneer Society. Sixty-two men were present to sign the charter roll, the earliest settler being Robert Callis who arrived in 1859. Dr. Bard was elected president and L. F. Eastin, secretary, both holding office until death took them in 1901 and 1903 respectively. The society was divided into two classes: Class A—Inhabitants, other than native Indians, being members of the old Latin American families coming mainly from Spain and Mexico, together with early American settlers who were here prior to December 31, 1866. Class B—Inhabitants here subsequent to January 1, 1867 and prior to June 3, 1873.

"The meeting was a joyous one, the pioneers clasped hands, and a grand reunion took place. Some had not met with others for ten years. It was like a family gathering. Old times were talked over, old friends remembered, and any of the 'Old Timers' would have thought it was 18 years ago, only hair was thinner and grayer, spectacles were on many eyes that 18 years ago were bright and clear. Time had set his mark on each and all. But the heart of the old pioneer was as warm as ever. The hair might be gray, the eye dimmer, but their hearts beat as warm and sincere as in the days of 1873 when they were but a handful trying to found a new county, miles and miles away from a railroad, where daily papers were almost unknown, and the Old Line Stage Company was almost their only means of travel. Many faces were missing, some in other counties, some in other states and many have joined the silent majority . . .

"We missed John T. Stow, J. D. Hines, L. T. Saxby, W. J. Walton, Henry Spear, C. L. Preble, Joseph Richardson, Sr., R. G. Surdam, F. S. Leach, Nephi M. Jones, Joseph Bartlett, P. V. McCarthy, L. D. Roberts, and Uncle Billy Ayers.



"These old pioneers have gone before to explore that unknown land, and in a few years more we, too, will join them, and leave to our sons and daughters the sacred duty of preserving the memory of the old pioneers.

"The memories of early times in California will live only in history, and as we pass away the newspapers will perhaps notice us under the caption, 'Another Pioneer Gone,' or 'Passing Away.' In the language of an old pioneer now dead and gone, 'There is a romance attached to early days, (something not easily explained to those who were not here) a kind of Free Masonry, binding fraternally all those who lived here in a time when the very sense of remoteness and isolation from the rest of the world brought men closer together. No pioneer will, if he lives a century to come, turn a cold shoulder upon one of the old time boys.' With kindness in our hearts toward everyone, we still remember those old words: 'Old books to read, old wine to drink, old wood to burn and old friends to talk with' . . .

"A. D. Barnard, the pioneer of 1868, knowing the thirsty proclivities of the pioneers, had a ten gallon keg of ice cream in readiness at the courtroom, and the pioneers, one and all, were invited to partake. With three cheers for Barnard and the Pioneer Society, they adjourned to meet at the courthouse on Saturday, October 19, 1891 at 2 P.M."<sup>1</sup>

Apparently the Society, under the leadership of Dr. Bard, was fairly active from 1891 until his death in 1901. Thomas R. Bard succeeded his brother as president and L. F. Eastin remained secretary until his death in 1903, when John A. Barry was appointed his successor. Through carelessness the records of the Society, which Mr. Eastin had kept at his office, were destroyed following his death so the early minutes and membership lists are not available. Evidently the Society was inactive until August 31, 1907 when a number of pioneers met at the Anacapa Hotel to choose delegates to attend the first State Convention of California Pioneer Societies, to be held at San Jose, September 7, 8, and 9. It seems odd that the first State Convention was not held until fifty-seven years after California became a state; there must have been many local pioneer societies throughout the state, most of them older than our organization. Among the matters discussed in a general way was the naming of a historian from the order and the good which might come of the securing of a pioneer hall and the establishment therein of a museum. During his term as president Dr. Bard had endeavored to raise funds for construction of a pioneer hall but largely because of a drought which prevailed through the 1890's he was unable to secure sufficient backing.

On October 5, 1907 the pioneers met in adjourned session at the City Hall, a large number of citizens being present. President T. R. Bard made a brief address, stating that the object of the meeting was to organize on a firmer footing; that it was necessary to pick up the dropped threads as the Society had no records, no home and in con-



sequence no place to keep its belonging. He said that the by-laws, thought lost, had been found, as was a partial list of members; that it would be well to keep the society together as members were getting along in years and the ranks were rapidly thinning out. At the insistence of Mr. E. P. Foster, Mr. Bard consented to remain as president. It was at this meeting that the constitution and by-laws were amended to make January 1, 1876 the admission date for membership and make women eligible to membership.

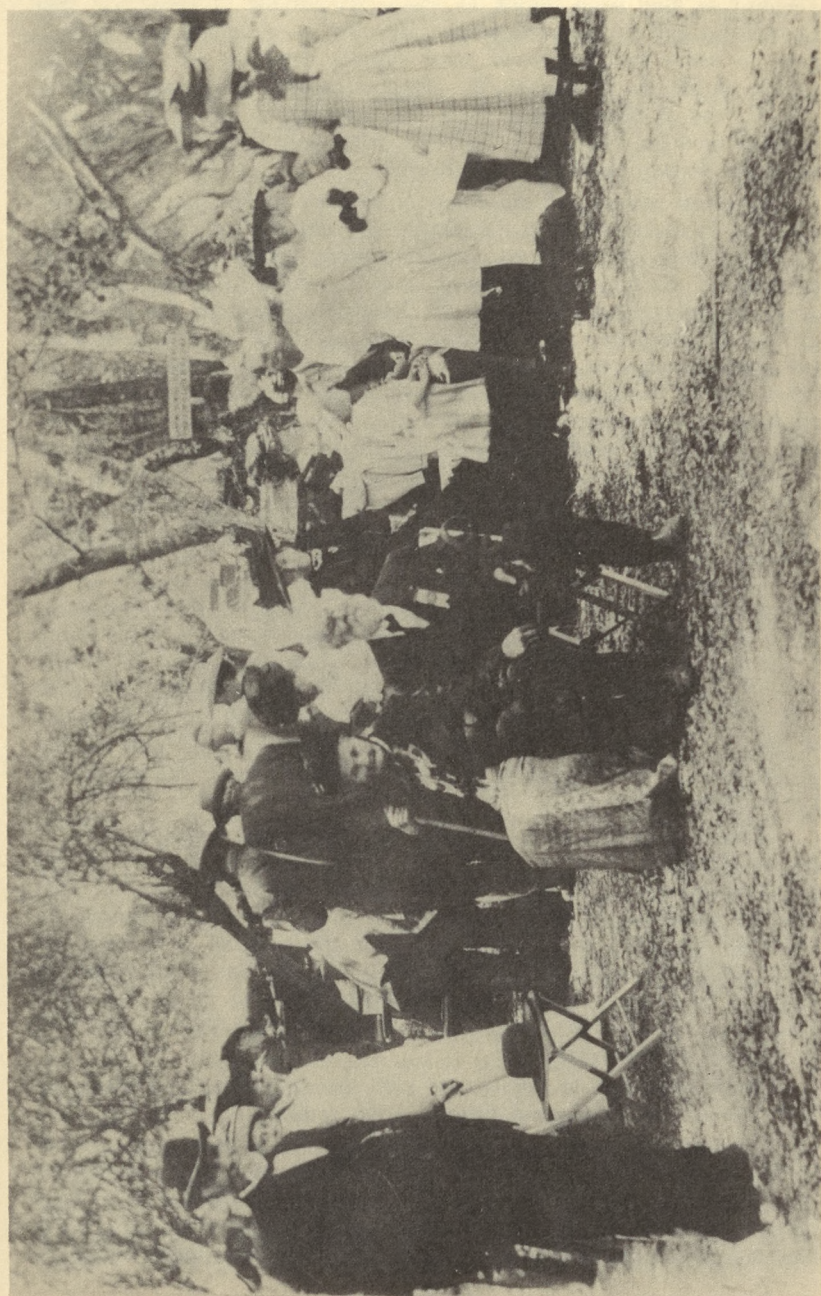
An event which will go down in history as the largest pioneer gathering in county history, was the picnic held at Foster Park on May 20, 1911. There had been no general meeting of the old settlers since the death of the founder, Dr. Bard; and the idea of a picnic was conceived by John Darling and E. M. Sheridan. Through the liberality of Thos. R. Bard two special trains were provided, to run from Piru and Santa Susana to Foster Park. This wonderful gathering of old timers was in itself an historical event in the county, an event which will long be remembered and talked about by the children of the pioneers. Some four hundred persons signed the register, their dates of arrival extending from 1847 (J. Y. Rodriguez) to 1892. Everyone who could, attended. It was a basket picnic, with music, speechmaking, and a re-organization of the Pioneer association. Paul Charlebois was made presiding officer in the absence of President Bard; and John Barry acted as secretary, which position he had long held. A feature of the meeting was to pass a resolution making the qualifications for membership a residence of twenty years or more in the county, the hope being in this way to continue interest among the sons and daughters of pioneers. The speaker of the day was attorney W. E. Shepherd who, with John J. Sheridan, conducted the *Ventura Signal* following the death of John H. Bradley, the founder of the paper. A fluent and accomplished speaker, Mr. Shepherd gave an eloquent address; unfortunately, it is too long to reproduce.

Pioneer activities seem to have been suspended throughout 1912, but on October 27, 1913 this notice was published in each of the county newspapers: "Members of the Ventura County Society of Pioneers are requested to meet at the courthouse in San Buenaventura on November 15, 1913 at 2 o'clock p.m., for the purpose of considering taking action upon the proposition of placing the 'Dr. Bard collection of curios' in custody of the Board of Supervisors, to be by them displayed in a room in the courthouse, to be cared for and preserved at the expense of the county".

The Society met in accordance with the call. Senator Thomas R. Bard presided and delivered the following speech:

"Pioneers—though our by-laws provide for at least one general meeting in each year, you have not been summoned to a meeting in six years. Your officers were elected for one year only yet they have held on to the honors and emoluments of the offices ever since 1907. Their conduct is unlike that of the President of the Republic of Mexico





Pioneer picnic, 1911

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only in respect to the methods employed for continuing themselves at the head of affairs.

"Huerta maintains his position by force and intimidation, we have succeeded by the peaceful means of our own inertia and the apathy of our members.

"It would be strange if many changes have not occurred in our membership during these last six years. Even then the bared heads of most of us had changed to gray and our locks of hair were sadly thinned and mocked our temples for a covering. When the roll was called last there were many who did not answer, and when the roll was called today there were many who could not answer.

"There is nothing in the make-up of the old pioneers that yields to hysteria. They do not wear their hearts upon their sleeves, but in silence bow their heads submissively to the inevitable strokes of the Death Angel and by acts rather than words pay tribute to the memory of the absent ones and sympathy for the bereaved who are left.

"We are associated together for no benevolent, religious or political purpose. Our aim is to be sociable and the tie that binds together is mainly the desire to recall the incidents in the early settlement of the county in which we have participated. The beginnings of an American settlement in a new country are always interesting to succeeding generations and we owe it to them that the annals and the traditions of the Pioneers should be recorded. Ordinarily a true understanding of historical events cannot be obtained until they are seen through the eyes of the onlooking analyst. The written pages of public records lack in animation and only draw the rough outlines of the real picture that the historian wishes to complete.

"It seems to me that our society has not pursued with due diligence the original purpose of its organization and that until we methodically apply ourselves to preparing records of the events in which we have participated or with which we are cognizant, relating to the establishment of American domination of our part of California as well as to the beginning and gradual growth of the development of its natural resources, will our duties to posterity be completely performed. When we consider that there are men living now who qualified themselves for membership in this society more than half a century ago, we may confidently hope that such an effort would be amply rewarded.

"One little effort was made a few years ago in that direction by Mr. E. M. Sheridan under the direction of the trustees, who wrote biographical sketches of some of the members of the society, but his efforts were not supported as they should have been. The intention was that these sketches should not only record the family and personal history of the subjects, but particularly their reminiscences of other persons who participated in the founding of the American colony whom we call pioneers—their recollections of interesting events and their individual observations of conditions prevailing in early days.

"A new effort should be made to have this work extended and I



recommend that at this meeting a committee be appointed to conduct a rigorous campaign for securing the collection of biographical and historical information and that adequate financial support be given to the committee that it may employ a competent and interested writer to compile and prepare the data for publication.

"This is not an aristocratic club or society, formed for the glorification of character and achievements of its members, and there should be no thought that these proposed biographical sketches are to be prepared for such purposes. But each member, if he will, can contribute interesting and valuable data to a historical collection.

"A suggestion was made at the last meeting that ladies who were willing to admit their eligibility by reason of early association, might become members of the society, and while the suggestion was favorably received, no definite action in the matter was taken. I recommend that no further delay may occur to bring into our society the most congenial companion that we ever had in our youthful days and that we do not wait for application for membership from them, but take the awful hazard of electing some of them at once to our membership and trust to their ever dependable loyalty for forgiveness for this very worst of our many indiscretions."

In a move to perpetuate the Society, Thomas R. Bard was re-elected as president and at the request of J. A. Barry, incumbent, Sol N. Sheridan was elected secretary. No action was taken toward electing vice-presidents, treasurer or marshal, thus continuing in office as vice-presidents Messrs. J. A. Barry, K. P. Grant, T. A. Rice, E. P. Foster, and F. Hartman. The treasurer was J. C. Collins; marshal, Paul Charlbeois. It was found that since the meeting held October 5, 1907 Trustees Joseph Hobart, Thos. Clark and L. Schiappa Pietra had died; the society therefore elected K. P. Grant, A. Canet, and H. P. Flint to fill the vacancies, the names of the entire board being: Thos. R. Bard, W. E. Shepherd, K. P. Grant, Wm. B. Baker, H. P. Flint, Peter Mc-Millan, A. Canet, N. W. Blanchard, Sr., Thos. Cloyne, A. Camarillo, and J. S. Collins.

Pursuant to the purpose stated in the call for this meeting, the society proceeded to consider the proposition of placing the "Dr. Cephas L. Bard Collection of Curios" in the custody of the Board of Supervisors, and for the information of those present the following paragraph from the last will and testament of the late Cephas L. Bard was read:

"I give and bequeath to Elizabeth Bard Memorial Hospital my collection of curios in trust, to be delivered to the Society of Ventura County Pioneers when that society shall erect a suitable hall in the town of San Buenaventura, my executors, hereinafter named, to determine the suitability of such hall to receive my curios."

The following resolution was offered by Sol N. Sheridan, who moved its adoption, the motion being seconded by K. P. Grant:

"Whereas, It has been proposed, in the interest of the better



preservation of the collection of curios made by the late Dr. Cephas L. Bard and bequeathed to the Elizabeth Bard Memorial Hospital in trust for the Society of Ventura County Pioneers, that this collection shall be turned over to the care of the county of Ventura, to be by the county properly cared for and displayed in the Chamber of Commerce room in the new courthouse; and

"Whereas, Under the terms of the will of the late Dr. Cephas L. Bard, it is provided that this collection shall come to the Society of Ventura County Pioneers whenever that society shall erect a suitable hall in the town of San Buenaventura for the housing of such collection, the executor of the will of the late Dr. Bard to determine the suitability of such hall for such purpose; and

"Whereas, The placing of the collection on view in the Chamber of Commerce room will, in our opinion, best serve the purpose which its founder intended that it serve, namely the purpose of the education of the youth of Ventura County in the history of their own section; as well as make the collection of the highest possible interest to the public generally; and

"Whereas, The new courthouse, being a fire-proof building, is a safe place for the keeping of such collection and the Board of Supervisors of Ventura County stands ready to assume the care and custody and be answerable for the safety of such collection; therefore be it

"Resolved, By the Society of Ventura County Pioneers, that we give our hearty approval to the proposed plan to turn the collection over to the care and custody of the county of Ventura, to be exhibited at all times in the Chamber of Commerce room, and be it further

"Resolved, that in assuming the care and custody of such collection the Board of Supervisors be requested to appoint a curator for such collection, and assuming that this collection is to form a nucleus for the County Historical Museum, that the Board of Supervisors be asked to direct such curator to set this collection aside to be known in all future time as the Dr. Cephas L. Bard collection, and provide for the listing of such collection and the publication of the list of articles contained therein; and be it further

"Resolved, That the executor of the estate of the late Dr. Cephas L. Bard be respectfully requested to designate the Chamber of Commerce room in the new courthouse as a suitable hall to receive the curios in the Dr. Cephas L. Bard Collection."

The resolutions were unanimously adopted and ordered spread on the minutes of the meeting; and a committee of three, consisting of Thomas R. Bard, K. P. Grant, and W. E. Shepherd were appointed to wait upon the Board of Supervisors, inform them of the action taken by the society, and request that they, in behalf of the County of Ventura, accept by formal resolution the custody of the collection of curios of the late Cephas L. Bard as proposed in the resolutions.

The committee was also instructed to recommend to the Board of Supervisors the appointment of Sol N. Sheridan as curator, to have



charge in behalf of the county and in accordance with the terms of the resolutions just adopted, the Dr. Bard collection and proposed Ventura County Historical Museum.

It was definitely determined that ladies who were eligible by reason of early association could become members of the society; and a committee of three, consisting of Sol N. Sheridan, J. A. Barry, and Thomas S. Newby was appointed to ascertain the names of all ladies eligible for election to membership in the Society of Ventura County Pioneers, and to notify such ladies of their eligibility.

Secretary Barry recommended that inasmuch as the minutes of the proceedings of meetings held previous to October 5, 1907 were lost, that search be made through the files of old papers for the reports and proceedings of meetings that may have been held, and when found be copied into a new minute book in order of their dates so as to bring the proceedings of the society down to date, make their recordings complete, and enable the secretary to form a correct list of members of the society. Incidental to this search, it was suggested that all reference to the deaths of pioneers be noted and recorded in proper books; also, that some competent person be compensated for making this search.

This recommendation met with the approval of those present, and K. P. Grant moved that an assessment be levied to obtain funds for this work. Senator Bard, however, deemed it the better plan to have this done by voluntary subscription and very generously offered to pay the necessary expense himself; and upon his suggestion the motion made by Mr. Grant was withdrawn.

At the December, 1914 meeting the Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution to establish Ventura County Pioneer Museum, to house the Cephas L. Bard collection of curios and such other items of historical interest as might be offered. Mr. Sol N. Sheridan was appointed as curator, which position he held until 1915 when he resigned to accept newspaper work. His brother, E. M. Sheridan, was appointed to succeed him.

E. M. Sheridan did a remarkable job in collecting, cataloguing and displaying the thousands of items in the museum collection. He resigned in 1938 after having served as curator for twenty-three years, and being succeeded by the present incumbent.

On July 1, 1957 the Board of Supervisors and the Ventura County Historical Society entered into a contract whereby Ventura County continues to finance museum operations while the Historical Society is responsible for operation, management, and personnel, an arrangement which has proved to be satisfactory to all concerned.

Mr. Sol Sheridan's brief tenure as curator did not allow time for the compilation of data concerning the Society of Ventura County Pioneers, and nothing was done, officially, toward establishing a record of Pioneer activities. Ventura County Historical Society will shortly commence work on this project, which will entail the search of records in both Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.



Following the death of Thomas R. Bard in 1915, affairs of the Pioneer Society were largely in the hands of John A. Barry, Sol and Ed. Sheridan, Adolfo Camarillo, L. W. Corbett, A. L. Drown, Miss Grace Atmore, and Mrs. Hattie Fagan. Apparently there was no activity during the World War I years; "Hooverizing" did not exactly encourage picnics, and owners of automobiles were the exception rather than the rule.

Through the 1920's picnics were held every year at Foster Park, but it was not until 1930 that the society took steps to study local landmarks and make provision for identifying sites. Under the leadership of Mrs. D. W. Mott, the women's clubs of the county published, "Legends and Lore of the Long Ago," in 1929, which no doubt inspired interest in local history so that the Pioneer Society was stirred into action. Under the presidency of L. W. Corbett in 1933, W. W. Orcutt proposed that a monument to the pioneers of the county be erected. Mr. Orcutt<sup>2</sup> spoke as follows:

"The Pioneers have given much to enrich the county and the state. It is a heritage which those who came after them should cherish, protect and conserve.

"Now that year by year the ranks of the real pioneers are growing thinner and thinner, and only a few remain, and these too will all too soon pass through that last experience, that last adventure, into that land from whose bourne no traveler returns, we should honor them, not in words but in a more substantial way.

"At the request of the chairman, I wish to suggest for your consideration, that the Pioneer Society of Ventura County erect in appreciation of the efforts and accomplishments of the early pioneers, and in their honor at a suitable spot in this beautiful park, a huge, rough Sespe sandstone boulder, emblematic of their rugged characters; emblazoned with bronze plates bearing the names, dates of arrival and date of death of each, and that it be dedicated with proper ceremony at next year's meeting, to the end that it may become the shrine of the Society, and revive and preserve the history of our early pioneers."

The suggestion was unanimously adopted; and with the help from individuals and the Board of Supervisors, the monument was erected in Foster Park and was dedicated by President George C. Power at the 1934 meeting. Some 200 names were inscribed, but later investigation shows that many names were inadvertently omitted. As there is room on the monument for another bronze plaque, we hope to have it installed after thorough search of available records has been made.

It might be of interest to note that the repeal of prohibition made it necessary to change picnic dates in 1934 and 1935 from May to June. It seems that Ventura staged a "Days of the Golden West" celebration in 1933 and 1934 on dates in conflict with the Pioneer picnic. The picnic was held in May, 1933; but for the next two years the officers of the Society, going on the principle "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em", decided on the second Saturday in June.



In 1935 Frank J. Dennis was president; S. B. Bagnall, vice-president; and Wm. Reese, secretary. Dr. D. W. Mott spoke on early experiences as a physician in the county. Miss Grace Atmore proposed that a number of local historical sites be selected, these to be marked by bronze markers. Hon. Robert M. Clarke<sup>3</sup> was appointed to select the sites and to request from the supervisors funds for purchase of ten plaques. The sites were selected, then plaques were purchased, and one was set in Kenny Grove. Then came World War II, so the plaques remained in storage and were, unfortunately, forgotten until in 1955 the first one was installed at Rancho Camulos. Since then two or three others have been put in place and others will be taken care of as funds become available.

In 1941 the charter of the Pioneer Society expired, and it was not thought advisable to renew it. Since 1941 the Pioneer Society has functioned as a "loose" organization. Annual picnics are held, a president, vice-president and secretary elected; but the organization has, for all practical purposes, been taken over by the Ventura County Historical Society.

May we, the descendants of the men and women who founded Ventura County, continue the work they so ably began and carried out to the best of their ability with such tools as were at hand. They could not, nor will we be able to do all that should be done but, to quote Robert Louis Stevenson: "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labor."

#### Notes

1. *History of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Ventura Counties California*. Chicago 1917. The quotes from the 1917 County History were undoubtedly written by the late L. F. Eastin and taken by the compiler of the history from Eastin's minutes or a newspaper article on him.

2. One of the very scarce and little known books of interest to Ventura County is *Memorabilia of William Warren Orcutt, 1869-1942*, Los Angeles, 1945. It was privately printed in a very limited edition for Mrs. Orcutt three years after the death of her husband.

3. Judge Robert M. Clarke was author of *Narrative of a Native*, Los Angeles, 1936.



# The Great Halloween Prank

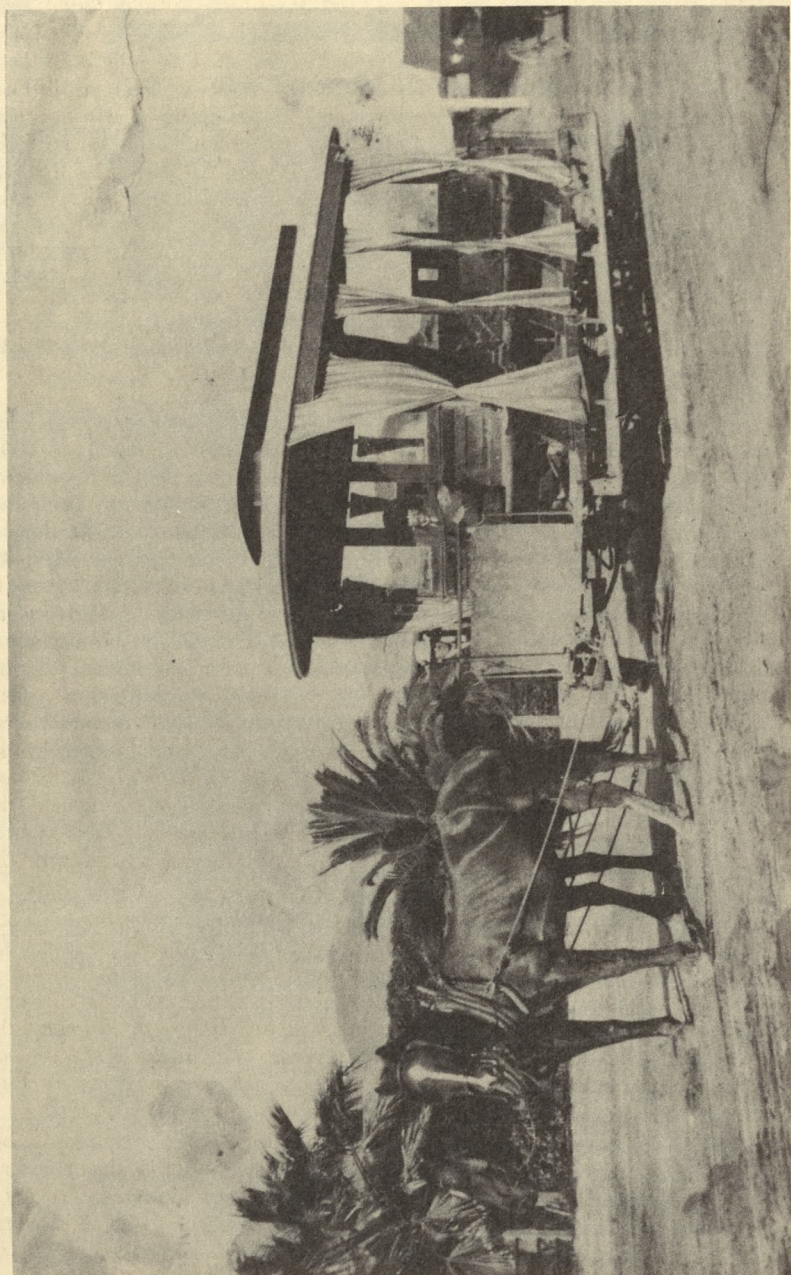
By JOSEPH F. MAGUIRE, M.D.

There is hardly a resident of the fair city of San Buenaventura, unless it might be babes-in-arms or inmates of Loma Hall, who has not heard in some fashion or other the story of the night Ventura's horse cars went to sea. After much diligent research through City Hall files, old newspapers at the County Library, and listening to the tales of those who were either in on the task or who had heard it "almost first-hand" from participants, the old chronicler can now put into immortal prose what actually happened on that Halloween in 1908. Before getting into the recounting of that escapade, however, a little background must first be laid.

San Buenaventura is the only city in Ventura County which ever had a street railway. This railway had its inception in April of 1891 when Truman B. Gosnell wrote a letter to the Town Trustees requesting that he be granted a franchise to build a streetcar line from the east edge of town (the intersection of Front Street and Thompson Boulevard) west on Front to Ash Street, Ash to Meta Street, Meta to Chestnut Street, Chestnut to Main Street, Main to Ventura Avenue, and Ventura Avenue north to the city limits. He also requested certain other branches meant to tap the wharf and industries along Front Street and River Street. It was apparently his plan to build a regular electric line. The request, however, lay dormant for almost a year; and then in April of 1892 a group of prominent Ventura businessmen, most of whom were associated with the water company, incorporated the Ventura and Ojai Valley Railway.

This organization requested the same type of franchise from the Board of Trustees. After a great deal of argument over the details of the franchise, which was highlighted by the withdrawal of the request at one of the Town Trustees Meetings, a meeting of the minds came about and the company received its franchise. By its terms the company agreed to limit the track gauge to three feet, six inches. It was to be single-tracked all through the town with no switches on Main Street, no more than two cars on any one train, and at least four hundred feet between trains. Inasmuch as the line was originally projected to go clear to the Ojai Valley and Nordhoff, the City Fathers were making sure that freight and large passenger movements did not pass through the center of Ventura on their way to the Ojai, which accounted particularly for the limitation of track to the so-called "narrow gauge." The franchise also spelled out that the company was to keep the track in good repair at all times and up to the common grade of the streets in which the track was laid—an important factor in our story. A certain minimum number of round trips were to be made on





Ventura and Ojai Valley Railway Car Number 1



the line each day at the price of a nickel per passenger for one way. The mode of power could be of any type, including animal, cable, electricity, but not steam.

It might be expected from the reaction of the townspeople in 1902 to the contemplated building of the Bakersfield and Ventura Railway that the granting of this franchise would cause quite a stir amongst the population and would be the subject of much conjecture in the local newspapers. This was not the case. Only diligent searching of the periodicals of the day revealed in "local briefs" that things were happening on the railroad. I would suppose that the problem of transportation did not arise in a town which was perhaps only fifteen blocks square at the most, and the populace evidently remained rather phlegmatic to the whole proposition.

The first spike was driven at the Southern Pacific Depot on July 15, 1892; the only spectators present for the event were President Chrisman of the railway company and John Harman, both of whom just happened to come by. Despite the apparent calm acceptance of the new railway by the town, work went well; and within a week the rails had been laid up to Meta Street and were making the turn down it. Ten days later, by the 2nd of August, the rails had been laid down Main Street and were about to go up the Avenue; and by August 16, rail was laid up the Avenue to the city limits. Work was then stopped "temporarily," apparently to give the line's engineers opportunity to determine how they were going to build around Gosnell Hill (scene of the ill-begotten Gosnell curve of pre-freeway days.) However, as the months went by, it was quite apparent that the temporary layoff was permanent. The workmanship on that portion of the line which had been built in the town was excellent and was done under the supervision of George C. Power as Chief Engineer (who later held the post of County Surveyor for many years) and J. B. Ward as Superintendent of Rail. A sufficiency of oak ties were used to accept the rail; and the roadway on either side of the streetcar right of way was brought up to the rail height with crushed rock and asphaltum, the latter work being done by the city.

In October of 1892 the little horse cars arrived at the depot. They were small and of the open type, numbered One and Two respectively, with VOVR emblazoned on the dashboards on either end. President Chrisman stated that as soon as car sheds and horses could be provided general service would begin. The *Ventura Democrat* finished the article with the quote, "Ventura will appear very metropolitan when the streetcars begin to run and she can hold her own with Santa Barbara."

Horses and car sheds must have been in very short supply because it was not until June 21st of the next year (1893) that the first car finally threaded its way through the streets of Ventura. The first "motorman," Matt McKenney, had to proceed very slowly and carefully on this initial trip as the ten-month interval since the laying of



track had allowed a great deal of dirt to accumulate on it. In some places it was covered quite thoroughly, making it necessary for an employee to walk in front of the horse drawn vehicle with a broom and clean out the track. At this time a switch off Meta Street onto the wharf was contemplated but apparently never built, as I can nowhere find a record of this being accomplished.

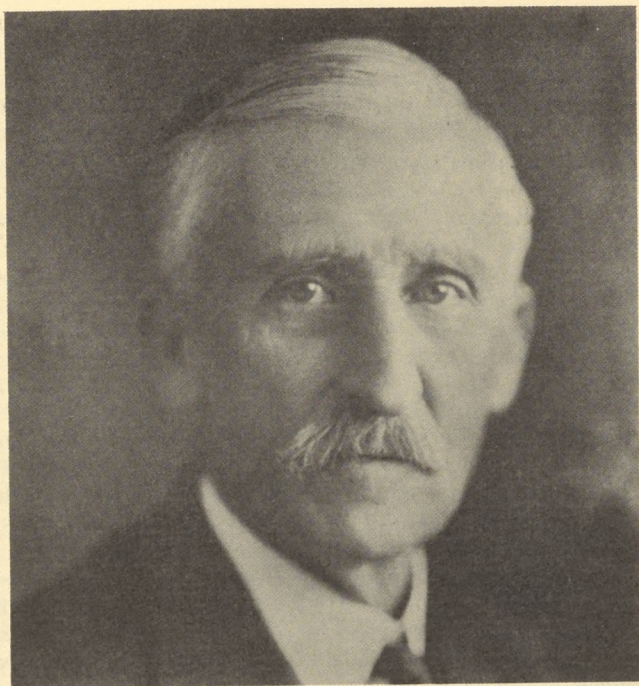
With these few facts in mind of the inception of the Ventura and Ojai Valley Railway, we will skip over the years between 1895 and 1908 and get to the subject matter of this composition. The intervening years, coupled with a policy of maintenance other than absolutely necessary to keep the cars moving, had made of the trackage and the cars a real life "Toonerville Trolly." The track was crooked in all three dimensions; and the road itself was full of pot holes, rotted ties, and lost rock. Of the original asphaltum binder of the crushed rock, not enough was left to seal the leaks in the car roofs. At its best, service was erratic and at its worst, non-existent. Enough trips were made to satisfy the particulars of the franchise; but despite much prodding by the Town Trustees and innumerable promises by the operators of the railway, trackage was never upgraded and was never brought up to standards laid down in the original franchise.

By the summer of 1908 the end of the little line was in sight. Ventura, then as always a progressive town, had voted to pave all the city streets with the then last word in road surfaces—"petrolithic paving"—a mixture of crushed rock and asphaltum rolled and compacted by steamrollers. The fact that Oxnard was already doing this with Fifth Street may have had something to do with the sudden surge of progress. The Ventura and Ojai Valley Railway was given a few months in which to bring its trackage up to the new road grade while the other streets in town received the treatment. By late October only those streets on which the car line ran were without the much needed new pavement. Despite rough talk by the Town Trustees, promises were still all that the V&OV could give; and so the matter stood on Saturday, October 30, 1908.

Most of the reminiscences of that evening have a gang of mischiefbent Halloween pranksters pushing the cars off the end of the wharf. This is the way it has been told to me numerous times by innumerable self-styled participants in the proceedings (there are almost as many of them as there were survivors of the "Charge of the Light Brigade.") I was finally fortunate enough to hear a true account by a bonafide participant whose pictures of the cars as seen the next day are shown here. The account was perhaps livened up a little by the judicious application of snake bite medicine, but the pictures and contemporary newspaper stories verify the important particulars.

On Halloween of 1908 about 150 of the young men of the town gathered at the bath house, apparently ready to do some sort of devilment in keeping with the spirit of the evening. I am sure that the seeds of the soon to be accomplished prank had been sown during the day





George C. Power

by influential parents of some of them; and a partial list of the young scamps would sound like a roster of the first families of Ventura, who felt that paving the city streets should not be stopped by this farce of the street car company. After a suitable interval of talking and smoking a few cigars and getting in the proper frame of mind, the group descended on car #1, which was parked on Chestnut Street just outside the horse stables and car barn, pushed it to the intersection of Ash and Front street where they lifted it off its tracks, carried it over the Southern Pacific tracks, and set it at the top of the Ash Street hill. Unfortunately the gates of the wharf were locked and could not be forced, so the original plan to shove them over the end of the wharf came to naught. However, a number of the multitude got aboard the little car and with a huge shove it went clattering down Ash Street. About half way down it went into the ditch, fortunately injuring none of its riders, who immediately righted it, got it back on the road and gave it another push, this time with no freeloaders aboard. It slowed to a stop in the soft sand at the beach but was not allowed to rest there. The car was carried through the dry sand to that still wet from the recent high tide, and from there rolled to its final destination in the ocean about half way out to the end of the pier. My informant



tells me that this was one of the lowest of low tides that he had ever seen in Ventura, and it fitted in beautifully with the activities of the evening. The crowd then went back to the stables, pushed car #2 out of its stall and repeated the process, this time taking the car off its tracks at Chestnut and Meta and pushing it down to the top of the Chestnut Street hill. This time, with no rider aboard, it stayed on the street and was going so fast when it hit the soft sand it tipped over on its side. The assembled multitude then stoned every window out of the clerestory and left the car where it lay.

The next morning George Power, who was still the operator (and some said sole owner) of the line, arrived on the beach to see what had happened to his streetcars. One was still in the surf, and the other car lay where it had fallen the night before. A goodly crowd was present to see the sight. Many offers of advice as to how the cars should be retrieved were given during the morning, including some rather brief but to the point comments by the members of the gang of the night before, who turned out almost 100% to see the fun. Mr. Power, who was not noted for a tranquillized frame of mind at any time, was "blowing his stack" all over the place when he saw the problem he was faced with. However, he arose to the occasion and made a deal with one of the 16-year olds who was present in his bathing suit to swim out to the little car and tie a rope around the axle and bring it to the beach while he, Mr. Power, went to find a team to pull the car out of the surf. I have the feeling that this particular young man was my informant, although he was too modest or perhaps too cautious to say so even at this late date. Anyway, when Power returned, he had with him six mules and a driver (who worked for the contractor doing the paving) and the rope was ready to hitch on. With the first good pull, the car body came off the undercarriage; and Mr. Power was in orbit again and could only repeat something about "the axle, not the body; the axle, not the body." Again the rope went out and this time was tied to the axle and the undercarriage brought out.

The car at the foot of Chestnut Street was then pulled up the hill by the same mule team but was damaged extensively in the process. Both cars were sent over to the Ventura Implement Company for repairs. It took about a week to put them back into running shape, but during this period of time the franchise had irrevocably been broken. What was more in point, the streets on which the tracks ran had by then been definitely paved with the new process; and the Ventura and Ojai Railway tracks were covered from sight. There may have been an attempt on the part of the company to continue to operate on the city streets without the formality of using tracks; but this apparently did not meet with any success at all and, of course, the local gendarmerie had something to say about it too.

None of the culprits in the action were ever apprehended for there was never any serious effort made to determine exactly who they were and bring them to justice. As has been implied above, there





End of the line

is no doubt that this was done with the sub rosa approval of not only the Town Trustees but of most of the citizens; and I am sure that the plan had been hatched out prior to the setting of the sun that day. Someone probably slipped up and forgot to unlock the gates to the wharf; I feel that the erroneous stories have probably resulted from the repetition of the tale by the original participants detailing their original plan of action.

Recently the Ventura and Ojai Valley Railway made the local newspapers again, when the street department crews unearthed one of the old ties at the intersection of Oak and Main streets during another of that organization's frequent forays into the asphalt jungle.



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